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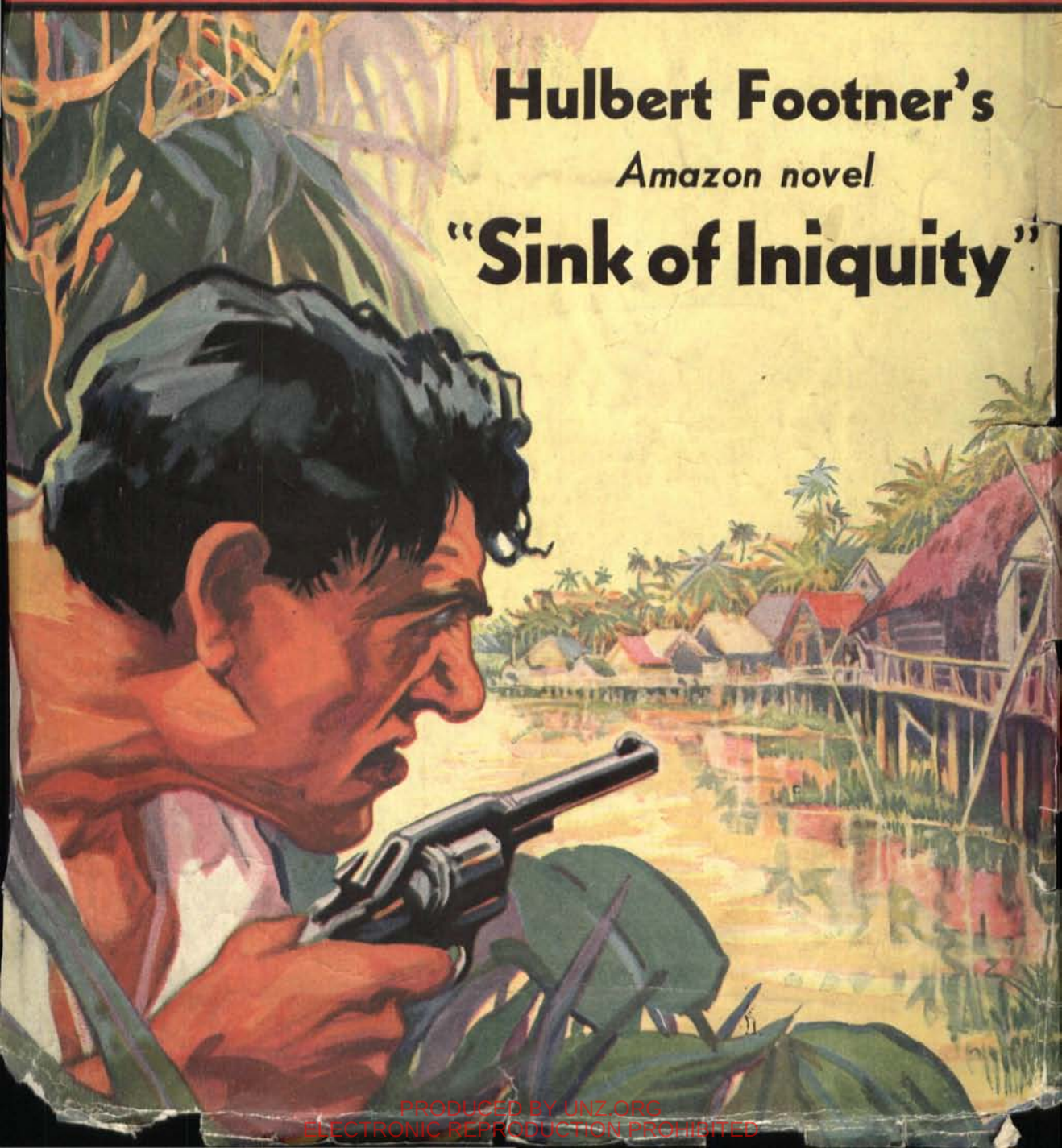

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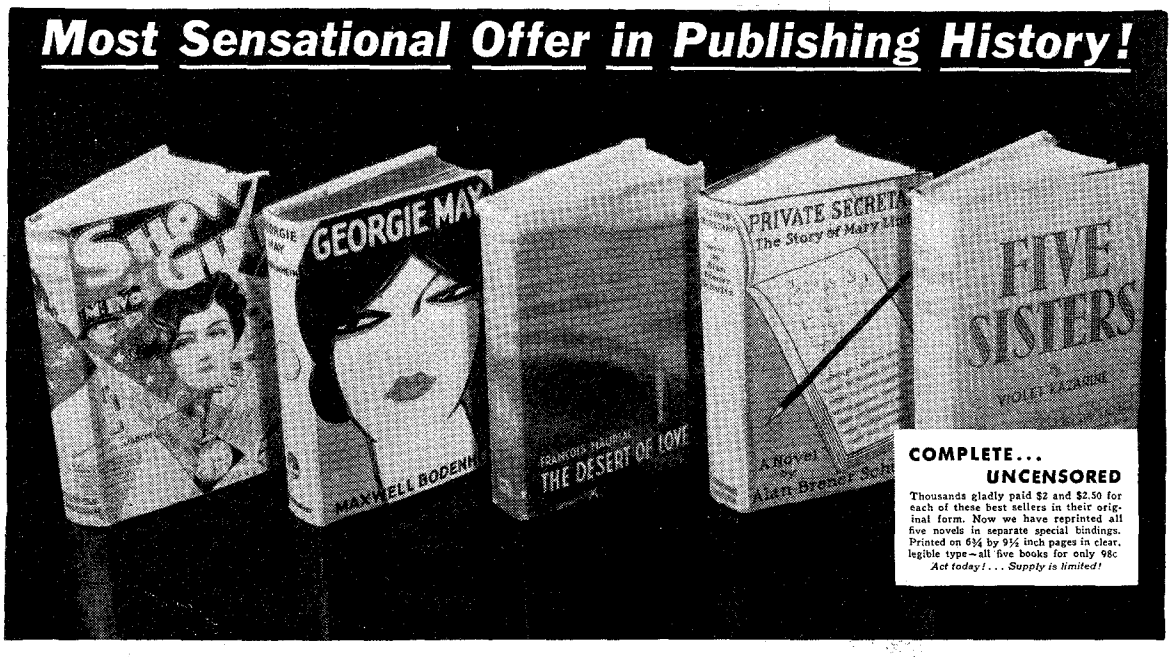

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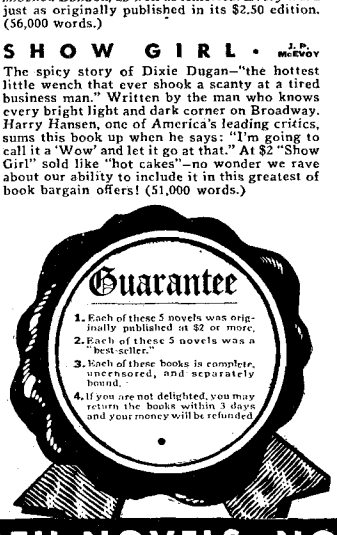
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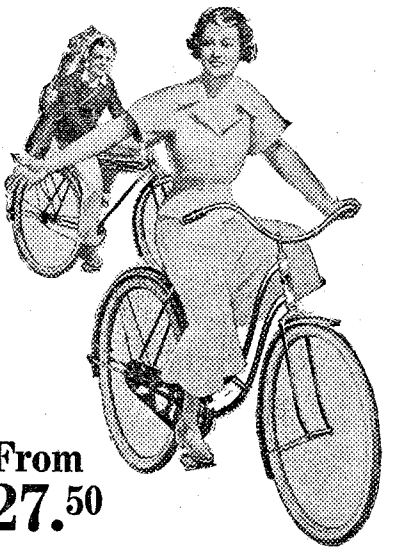

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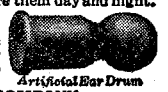

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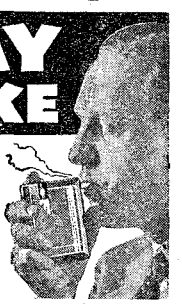

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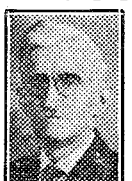

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Sink of Iniquity

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "The Murders in the Hotel Cathay," "The Hated Man," etc.

CHAPTER I.

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WHEN he was released from Sing Sing he would not look up any of his old friends. He slouched along the water front in New York, trying for a berth on a ship. Something he had read in a newspaper a year before had given him the idea that Fay had taken a theatrical engagement in South America. He had not answered her letters in prison because he thought it better

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Killing was too merciful. So Leggy devoted his life to bringing revenge — a death-in-life—to Jack Beatty, boss of Bom Successo

for her to break away from him clean. He had no hope of being reunited with her, but was stirred by a blind impulse to seek the same part of the world where she was.

Now he had been in Manaos for upwards of a year and was down and out. What chance had a man in a new country, he asked himself, without money or friends or a trade? As long as he kept shoes on his feet he had a hope of coming back, but when they finally dropped off, hope died. Once a white man went barefoot in the tropics he was done for, they said.

Somewhere or another he had picked up the name of Leggy because he could outrun anything on two feet. All he possessed in the world was a pair of cotton dungarees rolled up to the knees because the bottoms were tattered, a ragged cotton singlet, and a straw hat with part of the crown out. Gaunt, bearded, and black, he no longer knew himself when he happened to pass a mirror. Well, he felt comfortable in his disguise.

Late one afternoon while Leggy was lying half asleep in the shade of a warehouse commanding a view of the floating dock, he saw a trim new steamboat come up river and prepare to make fast.

She was loaded to the guards with balls of black rubber. Fifty tons, he figured, at six thousand dollars a ton! He groaned in bitterness. So much money in the world, and himself without a shirt to cover his nakedness! However, he sat up eagerly. There might be something in it if the owner was aboard.

A single passenger disembarked from the steamboat. Leggy sized him up with a beggar's sharpness. A

They saw the result of freedom among the lawless

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tall man, elegantly dressed in a frock coat and silk hat. There was something vaguely familiar about him. He was undoubtedly the owner of the rubber and also the steamboat; he walked as if the earth was his. Leggy moved to the other end of the warehouse, where he could intercept him as he passed.

When Leggy got a good look at the hard, handsome face, he pulled back as if he had been struck, and the beggar's whine died on his lips. It was Jack Beatty! Jack Beatty of all men on earth here in Manaos! As for the tall man, he looked right through Leggy, as if he didn't exist, and strode on his way.

Leggy's head whirled around. A hot resentment frothed up in him. Jack Beatty rich and free with diamonds in his shirt front and a steamboat full of rubber. Leggy started to follow him with no purpose beyond the need of feeding his hate. He always had hated Jack Beatty, even when he was taking his money. And Beatty had always hated him.

Oh, God! How he hated him! There walked the man who had wrecked his life! So strong was the feeling that it made Leggy come alive. He forgot himself. Beatty didn't recognize me, he thought with a cunning grin. If a weapon had been thrust in Leggy's hand at that moment he wouldn't have used it. Killing was too merciful. What he desired was to bring Beatty to a death-in-life such as he had known.

The tall man never looked behind him. He made his way to the main avenue. It was the hour of the promenade, and the pavement under the arcades was crowded with Brazilian officers, elegantly dressed women with the complexions of magnolia petals, frock-coated politicians, and foreign millionaires. Beatty strode along, head and shoulders above all, a contemptuous half-smile on his lips. Some persons of consequence greeted him respectfully.

He went into a jewelry store. According to gossip, more diamonds were being sold in Manaos at this time than in any city in the world. Leggy loitered in the gutter outside the arcade. Soon his man came to the door of the shop, accompanied by the jeweler, to examine a superb diamond bracelet that he held; three rows of solitaires set in platinum.

THE sight lighted a fire in Leggy. Jack Beatty can buy diamonds for his girl, while my belly is empty! Beatty bought the bracelet with a casual nod.

As he was coming out of the shop, a greasy Brazilian roustabout known as Bullmouth happened by in the gutter. Bullmouth occasionally served as runner for one of the cheaper houses, and was pretty well informed.

"Who is he?" asked Leggy.

"Torrenegro," said Bullmouth, with an admiring grin. "What you call Blacktower. He's one big man in Amazonas."

"What's his graft here?"

"They call him King of Bom Successo. He runs the town."

Leggy hurried on, fearful of losing his man.

Bom Successo; Portuguese for Good Success, generally shortened in American to Bum Success. Leggy had heard plenty about the place. A mysterious town buried in the jungle. In a side channel off the main traveled routes, they said; but easy enough to get to if you knew the way. Outlaws, absconders, wanted men from all

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over the world, had come together there to make a town where they could live as they pleased. No laws, no police, no government.

Men came all the way from Bolivia and Peru to spend their money there. Naturally the merchants of Manaos resented what they termed the unfair competition, and they were always after the Governor of Amazonas to clean up the place. But nothing had been done. It was said the Governor was making a good thing out of it on the "q.t." And Jack Beatty was the boss of Bom Successo! He would be, thought Leggy.

Blacktower went into the Hotel Inghilterra. Presently he came out again and sat down at a table on the sidewalk. Leggy lurked behind one of the pillars of the arcade, watching him. He ordered an apéritif, and surveyed the passing crowd with good-humored scorn. Sitting there stiff and buttoned up in the frock coat he looked just as he had looked at Martin's in New York, only here the frock coat was made of silk out of respect to the climate. There was a quality in his gaze that made men cringe.

By and by he spotted Leggy behind the pillar.

"Who are you looking at?" he demanded, with a cold stare.

An hour before Leggy would have taken to his heels, but something was changing him. He stood his ground. "No offense meant," he mumbled.

"Get the hell away from here," said Blacktower coolly. "You're spoiling the view."

Still Leggy made no move to obey. Blacktower rose suddenly, and an ominous furrow appeared in his forehead. His face was terrible in anger.

"Beat it," he said; "before I give you the boot! Barefooted dog!"

Leggy ran then. Darting across the street, he lost himself in a maze of alleys to the south, running blindly with his head down. Blacktower had touched him in his tenderest spot.

Barefooted! Barefooted!

HE passed a squalid little open space known as Prago dos Castanhas, though there were no castanha trees there, only a muddy rectangle with an adobe wall down one side and a row of cheap stores on the other. He passed a bench displaying rows of wooden sandals, and his flesh yearned like a starving man at the sight of food.

The *caboclo* proprietor was sitting beside his stock, and his eyes became sharp with suspicion at the sight of the barefooted man. The sandals sold for the equivalent of a dime a pair, but a dime was as far out of Leggy's reach as a gold eagle.

Down at the end of the row, out of sight of the *caboclo,* he stopped to take counsel with himself. If he didn't get shoes he couldn't face Blacktower again. The man would pass out of his life, and all would be the same tomorrow as it had been yesterday. Leggy felt himself sinking. Blacktower was his last straw. He turned and walked back again. At least he possessed one advantage; he could outrun any low-lifer in Brazil.

Stopping by the bench, he asked the price of the sandals. This was to give him time to pick out a pair big enough for him. His heart was beating fast. The *caboclo* was lazily swinging forward and back on the hind legs of his chair. Stooping suddenly, Leggy grasped the front leg of the chair and threw him over backwards. He then snatched up the sandals and ran.

The *caboclo* raised an ungodly noise.

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People darted out of the little shops in front of Leggy, and he veered out into the middle of the square. None dared to lay hands on the tall American. They fell in behind, yelling like a pack of fiends. At the bottom of the square Leggy darted into the darkest alley that offered itself. As he had figured, the *caboclo* had small stomach for running. After he had turned three corners he knew he was going to get away, and his breast was flooded with joy.

In a minute or two the sounds of pursuit died away, and he slowed down. He was drenched with sweat, and his heart was hammering. But his breast swelled with pride. I've got shoes!

HE returned to the Hotel Inghilterra. The sidewalk café was empty now, but in the course of time Blacktower came out of the hotel and sat down at a table. A waiter put a cup of coffee and a pony of cognac before him. Leggy arose and moved up and down the street filled with a thick excitement; longing to approach the man; afraid to show himself. Up and down, always drifting a little nearer, until finally the lights of the café fell on him, and Blacktower saw him.

He was in a better humor now, having dined.

"Well, damned if here isn't the hairy ape again!" he said with his contemptuous grin.

"You—you called me barefoot dog," Leggy stammered. "See, I got shoes."

Blacktower laughed heartily. "Well, what of it?" he asked. "It doesn't make much difference to you, does it?"

Leggy was silent.

"Much obliged for giving me a look," said Blacktower, with heavy sarcasm. "You can beat it now."

Leggy stood his ground.

"I'm an American, like yourself," he mumbled.

"You're no credit to your country," said Blacktower.

"I don't want to take money off you."

"What do you want, then?"

"I want a leg-up. I want you to give me a job."

Blacktower laughed again in pure amusement.

"Fellow," he said, "I got to have *men* to serve me."

Leggy said nothing.

However, Blacktower did not order him away again.

"What sort of job?" he asked.

"Anything at all."

"I might put you to work in the kitchen with the Chinese," he said, grinning.

"All right," said Leggy.

There was a silence. Blacktower rolled his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, and bored Leggy through and through with his hard black eyes. Finally he thrust a lazy hand in his pocket and drew out some coins. Choosing an American silver dollar, he threw it on the pavement at Leggy's feet.

"Go and get your face mown," he said; "if I can stand looking at it I may take you on."

Leggy picked up the coin and ran off. He knew of an humble barber in the Rua Vasca whose shop would still be open. Suddenly he stopped short. If he cleaned himself up, Blacktower would recognize him. Why hadn't he thought of that? He shivered and sweat in fear, but his legs automatically started moving again.

He staggered into the shop and,

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pressing the dollar on the surprised barber, said, "Give me a haircut and a shave."

Half an hour later he presented himself at Blacktower's table with a hang-dog scowl. Blacktower started to say something sarcastic, but the grin froze in his face. He half rose out of his chair, and fell back again.

"Matt McArdle!" he exclaimed softly. "Well, I'm damned! I'm damned!"

Leggy said nothing.

Blacktower quickly recovered himself.

"So you had your bit of fun with me!" he said, with his usual grin. "How in hell did you get down to this part of the world?"

"What does it matter?" said Leggy.

Blacktower suddenly snarled, "I don't owe you nothing!"

Leggy saw that behind his mask he was afraid. Full of hatred and afraid. They were predestined enemies. Their fates were crossed. And in a flash it came to Leggy: I'm as good a man as he. And at one stroke he entered on a new existence.

"DO you figure that I owe you anything?" Blacktower demanded.

"No," said Leggy. "It was just my rotten lot to get caught."

"And my luck not to get caught," Blacktower retorted with an ugly grin. "You always were a soft fool. Why didn't you brazen it out?"

Leggy shrugged.

"Well, if I don't owe you anything, what are you coming after me for?" Blacktower demanded.

"I didn't come after you," said Leggy. "It was just accident that I saw you."

"What do you want of me?"

"You said you'd give me a job."

Blacktower laughed in a surprised way.

"Man!" he said. "Bom Successo is no place for a policeman! There are men there from New York who remember you. They'd make it worse for you than Sing Sing."

"I'll chance it," said Leggy.

Once more Blacktower was silent, holding his head on one side to keep the smoke out of his eyes, and studying Leggy.

"All right," he said at last. "It'll be a kind of novelty to have an ex-sergeant of detectives for a kitchen mechanic. Matt McArdle, the darling of the Tenderloin, to black my shoes! You're hired. If you don't like it later, don't blame me."

Leggy lowered his eyes to prevent Blacktower from reading anything there.

"Come round in the morning," Blacktower went on carelessly, "and I'll stake you to an outfit. You can wear a pair of dark glasses around camp. I won't give you away. We're sailing tomorrow evening."

"I haven't eaten since morning," muttered Leggy.

Blacktower tossed him another coin.

CHAPTER II.

DREGS OF THE CUP.

BLACKTOWER and Leggy went aboard the steamboat Rio Purus at sunset next day. Leggy was wearing a natty white drill suit and a pair of white canvas shoes. New clothes made a big difference in his feelings. He could look anybody in the eye.

Crossing the dock, they passed a

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couple of beach combers known as Melba and Flat-car, who held out their hands, whining. Leggy made believe to haul off with his fist, and they beat it. Gosh! What a pair of dirty bums, thought Leggy.

The Rio Purus had a dandified Brazilian skipper, a rough Scots engineer, and a crew of *caboclos*. It was clear that Blacktower was the boss on board. The ordinary passengers swung their hammocks between stanchions on deck, but Blacktower had a private deck above, all screened in with copper mesh, and Leggy, as his servant, shared it.

Lying in his hammock with his hands under his head, and his long legs hanging out on either side, Blacktower said with an ugly smile, "Let's talk about old times. Did they give you hell up in Sing Sing?"

Leggy's flesh crawled at the recollection, but he kept a mask over his face.

"No worse than ordinary."

"They tell me it's jam to the convicts when they get their hands on a cop," Blacktower went on. "They find ways of making him sweat right under the eyes of the keepers, I hear. Is that a fact?"

"You can't prove it by me," said Leggy.

"You're a liar," laughed Blacktower. "I know."

A full stomach gives a man courage. However, Leggy was careful not to let it appear that he was becoming less in awe of Blacktower. If I make out he's got me scared, it will put him off his guard, he thought.

When they issued out of the Rio Negro, he noticed that they turned down the Amazon. Later, in the dark, he saw that the steamboat was bucking the current again. A deck hand told him they were ascending the Madeira River. This was where the worst fevers came from, he had heard.

During the night the steamboat left the broad river, and with the aid of her searchlight started pushing at half speed through a stream so narrow that the branches of the lofty trees laced overhead. The searchlight created a little false day in the thick night. The gigantic trees seemed to march out of the dark with a stare of surprise before disappearing into the dark astern. There was no visible land anywhere; the trees were rooted in the black water. Except for the slow heartbeat of the propeller, it was as still as a burial vault. Thick vines hanging from nowhere—bushrope, Leggy had heard them called, occasionally slapped against the sides of the vessel or dragged like snakes over the roof. Leggy slept and woke and slept again, as men do in hot countries.

When the sun rose the steamboat was still threading her way through the forest. Flocks of screaming parrots flashed overhead like broken bits of rainbow, and families of monkeys swung themselves out of sight like bunches of brown rope. Occasionally in an opening a gigantic orchid plant hung down a cascade of flame. A delicious morning freshness filled the air, and Leggy felt something that he had long forgotten: the sense of being young. After all he wasn't thirty yet. The old world wasn't so bad. A phrase out of the Bible kept running through his head: Born again! Born again!

AT evening their destination revealed itself with a dramatic suddenness. Rounding a bend, the narrow waterway opened into a broad pool, and a wooden pier supported on piles lay before them. A

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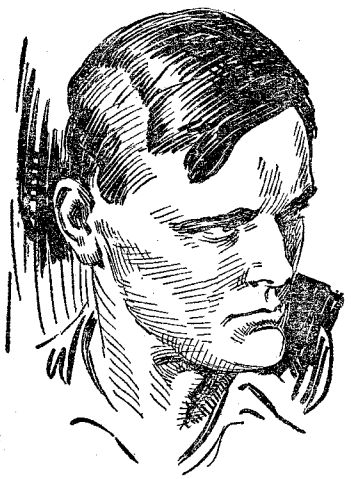
pier, an open space of bare earth, a cluster of houses around it, a crowd of men watching the steamboats. After the day-long solitude it was astonishing to discover that other little



LEGGY

humans besides themselves frequented this large-scale world.

WHILE the steamboat was maneuvering alongside the pier, Leggy looked over Bom Successo. It was built on a promontory of firm ground coming to a point at the river, having a creek flowing in at one side and a dry gully on the other. To the left of the pier rose a big warehouse with an iron roof, and beyond it a street of 'dobe houses straggled along the bank of the creek, with bigger buildings of wood sticking up here and there, and an occasional giant tree. A rickety bridge hung over the creek on the left, supported by bushrope from the trees above; and at the farther end of it was a crazy huddle of palm shacks, leaning this way and that on piles in the swamp.

"That's Brooklyn," said Blacktower.

The camp seemed quiet enough; nevertheless, before g o i n g ashore Blacktower opened his valise, and taking out his gun, dropped it in a special pocket in the tail of his coat. Leggy put on the dark glasses with a quickening pulse. I must get me a gun somehow, he thought, as he picked up his master's valise.

What seemed to be the entire population of the place had gathered at the shore end of the pier to watch the steamboat land. A rough looking crowd, but quiet; too quiet, somehow. There were no women amongst them. Blacktower walked down the pier like a king returning to his capital. There were no cheers to greet him. Over the tree tops to the right Leggy had a glimpse of gorgeous sunset clouds in orange and purple. The whole effect was queer.

There was a stir in the crowd. Suddenly every man had turned his face towards the center. Leggy saw a confused milling there; a man's shriek shattered the evening stillness. At the sound the crowd seemed to explode in pieces, every man running for dear life. By the time Blacktower reached the spot no one was there. No one, that is, except a single figure lying on the beaten earth with a wet and crimson shirt. His mouth was still open for that final shriek; he stared at the sky.

Blacktower looked down at him with a bored expression. A white man joined him, English by the look of him —a queer looking specimen, young but already bald as an egg, and cynical.

"Here's a nice thing!" drawled Blacktower. "Saluting the steamboat with a murder!"

"What do you expect?" said the Englishman. "It's one of the by-products of freedom."

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Blacktower ignored the flip answer. "Who is he?" he asked.

"A native from the upper Purus."

"Has he got anybody belonging to him?"

"No. He came alone."

"So much the better," said Blacktower. "Get rid of him."

Some of the *caboclos* were drifting back, registering innocence for the benefit of the white men. The Englishman gave an order, and four of them picked up the dead man by his arms and legs and, carrying him a little way out on the pier, swung him over the rail, still warm.

All leaned over the rail to look. The instant the dead man struck the water, a furious commotion took place. Leggy had a glimpse of flashing silver sides, and the river was whipped up into crimson foam.

The Englishman, observing Leggy's staring eyes, remarked in his cynical manner:

"Piranhas—in case you think of taking a swim."

Blacktower and the Englishman proceeded, and Leggy followed with the bag, in a daze. All over so quick! And all so casual and matter-of-fact.

"The trouble started over in Brooklyn," said the Englishman to Blacktower. "Two days ago. As I heard the story, a fellow called Archie came down the Madeira with a little bag of gold dust he had washed on the bars. He gave it to the woman called Black Amelie to keep for him. You know her. When he asked for it again, she said he had drunk it up in her house.

"Archie went away and collected his friends, and they hitched a rope to Amelie's shack, and started to pull it over in the swamp. But a friend of Amelie's shot into them out of the window, and they beat it. Ever since there has been scattered shooting over there, not to speak of knifings. I don't know which side that bloke was on."

"WELL, let them shoot it out," said Blacktower indifferently. "But warn them to keep to their own side of the creek."

They were crossing the open space of hard-packed earth. On their left a narrow street made a way, following the course of the creek in an S-shaped curve. Along it the close-built shacks had porches thatched with palm in crude imitation of the arcades of Manaos.

The whole effect was flimsy like theatrical scenery. As you went back from the river the promontory of high ground widened, giving room for a confusion of crooked lanes on the right.

Darkness was falling, and all at once hundreds of colored lights were turned on, giving the curving arcade a festive air. Coney Island, thought Leggy; Coney Island in the jungle. It was queer. Overhead you could see the gigantic still trees, brooding.

Blacktower turned to the right. At the end of a short side passage rose a more pretentious building than any in the neighborhood. It was square in shape, built of lumber, and surrounded by a broad veranda. They entered a brightly lighted hall; a roulette table at one side, smaller tables for loo, faro, *et cetera,* on the other. Jack Beatty has not changed his business, thought Leggy. There were no players at this hour.

At a cash desk just inside the entrance sat an elegantly dressed young man with a face as smooth and expressionless as wax. Leggy knew him.

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It was "Duke" Hammill, wanted by the New York police for murder. He and Leggy had had more than one run-in in the past, and the latter stiffened warily. A pair of dark glasses does not provide much of a disguise.

Hammill and Blacktower greeted each other casually.

"Hello, Duke."

"Hello, Black."

"How's business?"

"So-so."

Hammill looked at Leggy, and Blacktower said indifferently: "This is a servant I hired in Manaos. Answers to the name of Leggy."

"Why the blinders?" asked Hammill.

"Opthalmia," said Blacktower blandly.

Hammill accepted it; and Leggy relaxed. This guy would think no more of shooting me than rolling over in bed, he thought. I must get me a gun.

BLACKTOWER'S dwelling was in a separate building at the rear of the gambling hall. The ground fell away into the gully here, and the smaller house was built up on piles to bring it on a level with its neighbor. They were connected by a bridge. The piles were surrounded by an impenetrable thicket of bamboo, and even in the dark it struck Leggy how well suited the place was for defense.

He got a start upon entering it. It had been Blacktower's fancy to make the house look as much as possible like his famous place in New York. After the dirt and squalor outside, the oriental rugs, the oil paintings in heavy gold frames, the statuary, the deeply cushioned divans struck strangely on the eye. He had even brought the bronze statue of "Fortune" into the jungle. Every sporting character in New York was familiar with it. Leggy looked at the naked lady with an unfriendly eye. Heretofore she had brought him no good.

Leggy was handed over to the care of a grinning Hawaiian boy called George. Blacktower said:

"Tomorrow we'll start breaking you in. Tonight you can do what you please." The smile seemed to add: "If you get your damned throat cut, so much the worse for you!"

George showed Leggy where to sling his hammock on the veranda, and took him into the kitchen for his dinner. Leggy laid himself out to win the good will of his fellow servants. Particularly Chou, the fat Chinese cook. Fond of the bottle, Leggy saw. A timorous soul; afraid of the rowdy main street. Chou was not unwilling to be placated. It flattered him to have a white man serving in the kitchen.

After dinner a great restlessness seized Leggy. He was burning up for a drink. The town drew him. He could hear the shouting and the singing in the distance; the pounding of out-of-tune pianos and the plucking of guitars. He hadn't a cent of money, but he was accustomed to cadging drinks. He stole across the bridge and circled the veranda surrounding the gambling hall.

The place was oddly quiet, yet when he peeped through the slats of the blinds he saw that the tables were well filled.

A minute later he was in the main street. The din was terrific. Fights were of momentary occurrence. In one dive or another the music would be interrupted by a sudden uproar. Somebody would be thrown into the street; the music would recommence exactly where it had left off.

A white man standing at one of the

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open bars hailed Leggy. This was what he was looking for, and he went in. It was a fellow of his own age, half drunk, with a powerful and embittered glance. He was leaning on the bar, surrounded by half a dozen fawning *caboclos* for whom he was buying. He turned on them.

"Get out! Don't you see I've invited a gentleman to drink with me?" They faded.

"A new white stiff in town! Who the hell are you?"

"I work for Blacktower."

"We all work for Blacktower."

He suddenly leaned forward and, lifting Leggy's glasses, peered into his eyes. Startling. However, it appeared that his interest was a professional one. "White as milk," he said. "You come to this pesthole like a lamb to the slaughter. I'm the doctor here. Gene Buckles. Graduate of Johns Hopkins. Very brilliant fellow. Don't I look it?" He suddenly smashed his glass down on the bar. "What you drinking?"

"Rum," said Leggy.

"Rum for the gentleman!" shouted the doctor. "Genuine St. Croix, and none of your rotgut!"

Leggy downed it and felt like a new man. He was drawn to the doctor. This man gave utterance to feelings that were festering in his own breast.

"What you call yourself?" demanded the doctor.

"Leggy."

"GOOD! Nothing could be briefer or more descriptive." He glanced down. "You have the look of a sprinter. That's all right. But why hide your bonny blue eyes? There's no danger in being recognized by the law here."

"There are other reasons."

"Well, you're safe with me," said the doctor. "Have another." Presently he asked, "Where did Blacktower pick you up, Leggy?"

"In Manaos."

"Look! Did that black devil buy diamonds in Manaos?"

Leggy looked stupid. "How should I know?"

"He did! He did! Damn him!"

"What's he want diamonds for?"

The doctor grinned at Leggy derisively. "To stick up his nose." Leggy waited, sure that more would be forthcoming.

The doctor bared his teeth in a grimace of drunken, savage pain. "She sings in the theater here. Last turn. I'll show her to you directly... Oh, God!" he cried. "Here we are, sunk in this cesspool. Well, we become permeated with the stink and nobody gives a damn." He swallowed his rum at a gulp. "Then this girl comes. She brings to mind the things every man wants to forget. She looks like somebody's sister. Who is she? Nobody knows! They call her La Rosadora, but she's from God's country, like you and me, Leggy. How did she get in with this bunch of dames from Para? Nobody knows!

"She's never let outside the theater. It costs five dollars just to have a drink with her at the table. And what do you get out of it? She smiles in a way that would break a man's heart and talks about the weather!" The doctor ground his teeth together. "Well, if she falls for Blacktower, we'll know what she is," he muttered.

Presently he started for the street. "Come on!" he said over his shoulder.

They turned up the street. The last building but one on the left-hand side was a big, unpainted wooden shed, boarded up all round to a height of

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seven or eight feet, open above to permit the circulation of air. There was a wooden screen inside the entrance to keep anybody from seeing in. No advertising was necessary. Men were streaming in. The sound of a raucous female voice could be heard. Is that the w o n d e r f u l star? Leggy thought, grinning to himself.

At the ticket office Buckles said over his shoulder, "Costs five dollars."

"Haven't got it," muttered Leggy.

"Well, to hell with you, then. I need my money inside."

He disappeared. It was all one to Leggy. He drifted back into the crowded street looking for another buyer.

It appeared that a well-dressed white man had not to look far. It made a drunken *caboclo* feel big to treat such a one. It didn't trouble Leggy that there was something insolent in such hospitality. All he wanted was the rum. He lined up at another bar with a little fat brown man who gesticulated with a big diamond on his forefinger and boasted that he had three wives on the Rio Purus. Leggy let him run on. He didn't feel like talking.

As he was conveying his drink to his lips, he heard a sound that caused him to put the glass down again. A vagrant sound that for a second seemed to find a little hole in the surrounding babel and was then lost again. Far off, a woman's voice singing a song that he knew. He thought his senses must be tricking him. But he had only had one drink. Swallowing his rum, he listened with nerves at a stretch. He heard it again. His *caboclo* friend had turned to harangue somebody on the other side. Leggy slipped out into the street.

He walked along under the side wall of the building, gazing up at the opening like a soul barred from Paradise. He knew now that there could be but one voice in the world able so to tear his breast—he heard the slightly husky quality that had always prevented her from getting a principal part. A huskiness sweeter to him than silver bells. He *had* to see. He gauged the distance, sprang, and hooking his fingers over the top of the wall, drew his head over it.

He saw Fay on the stage. She had scarcely changed at all. The flaming red hair, the pale cheeks without rouge, shadowy eyes and wistful lips; what an apparition to rise in Bom Successo! Suddenly weak, he dropped to the foot of the wall and pressed his head between his hands. Such a violent emotion as he experienced exceeded both pleasure and pain. It was the sensation of flying to pieces.

After the song was over his faculties began to work. He saw things in a new way; the curving street with the colored lights, drunken crowd, high-arching trees. He was Matt McArdle again. He recollected with a shock that this was what he had come to South America for. He had found her after he had forgotten his search.

Fay in Bom Successo! The delicate Fay with her nice ways that he used to laugh at long ago, trapped in this hell-hole! Fay on the stage for these brutes to gape at! If I had not failed her she wouldn't be here, he thought, and tasted the dregs of the cup.

CHAPTER III.

HIS ONLY CARD.

FOOD was coming in all day at Blacktower's. Hampers from the steamboat with caviar, marrons, truffles and other delicacies of the great

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world. Cases of champagne and liqueurs. Also the best that the country could provide: turtles to make soup; a big bird called ungaruru that was to be roasted—the *caboclos* who brought it groaned and rubbed their bellies; a basket of silvery piranhas. Leggy wondered idly if these could be some of the same fish that had feasted on the dead *caboclo* last night.

When Chou was not requiring their services, the flat-faced George undertook to drill Leggy in waiting on table properly.

"God help you if you spill anything!" he said, grinning.

"What's all the excitement about?" asked Leggy.

"Big bonton dinner tonight. Boss gonna have his girl here!"

Leggy lowered his eyes. "Who's his girl?"

"La Rosadora."

Leggy thought of the diamond bracelet. "Who's she?" he asked offhand.

"She's the star singer in the show. Most beautiful woman in South America!"

The Hawaiian boy made sounds of rapture and kissed his fingers.

"Has she been here long?"

"Two weeks. Manoel Carvalho brought her up from Para."

"Tough place for a woman," ventured Leggy.

George shrugged. "She don't need to worry. She's took care of."

"What does she do all day?"

"I don't know. She's never seen."

FAY

"What do you mean, never seen?"

"Well, Manoel keeps her close, you bet."

Rage made Leggy's blood thicken. He skirted around the subject. "Who is this Manoel? Tell me about him."

"He runs the show. He's a smart feller. He don't have to take nothin' from Blacktower or nobody, because he's a friend of the Governor's—see?"

"What sort of fellow is he?"

"A regular low-lifer. You can see for yourself tonight. He'll be here. And Pepita will most certainly be with him."

"Who's Pepita?"

"His wife."

"So he has a wife."

"You and me'll be waitin' on 'em," said George.

Leggy stiffened all over.

"What's the matter with you?" asked George, staring.

"Nothing."

"You look as if you had a sudden bellyache."

"I was trying to remember," said Leggy quickly. "I must always come to the left of a person, you said, and offer the dish on the flat of my hand."

The lesson proceeded.

Leggy realized that there was no way of avoiding the ordeal. He was thankful for the dark glasses. Nobody looks at a waiter, he told himself.

The table was set for ten persons. As the dinner hour approached, Blacktower himself came to look it over. Leggy beheld him with new and burning feelings. Blacktower was fifty

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years old, it was true; but there was a vigor and power in him that a woman might find irresistible. He looked his best in evening clothes. So he had been dressed the first time Leggy had met him—and so had Leggy been dressed. Now Leggy was the waiter. Moreover, there was the diamond bracelet. Leggy had never come within a thousand miles of presenting Fay with such a bracelet.

Blacktower arranged bowls of orchids for the table. "Nobody else in the dump to do it," he grumbled, shamefacedly. He placed two rows of candles in pink shades. "When dinner is served, put out the other lights," he ordered.

Leggy's anxiety lightened a little. I'll be in the shadow, he thought.

At a moment when George was out of the room Blacktower looked at Leggy with a hard and quizzical smile. "Well, how goes it?" he asked.

"All right," said Leggy.

"Call me 'sir,' said Blacktower.

"Very well, sir."

"Tonight I'll call you William," Blacktower went on, grinning. "Leggy would hardly be the thing with ladies at the table."

GEORGE was stationed at the front door when the guests entered, consequently Leggy's ordeal did not begin until they came in to dinner. When Fay appeared in the doorway hanging to Blacktower's arm, the room rocked in front of his eyes. He clenched his teeth to steady himself. She did not look at him, but at the table decorations. She had a blue and silver dress on.

"How pretty!" she murmured in the voice that knocked on Leggy's naked heart. "I haven't seen anything like that since—"

She didn't finish the sentence.

She was seated at Blacktower's right. George and Leggy had already fixed it up between them that George was to serve the left side of the table and Leggy the right. This enabled George to get a good look at the beauty, while Leggy kept out of the direct line of her vision.

In the beginning he could see nobody else at the table. By degrees they began to register. A fat Brazilian, all dressed up, but fat and greasy still; a heavy dark woman his wife, once a beauty, perhaps, but now adorned with a mustache; two girls from the company, haggard under their rouge; Duke Hammill and another employee of the tables known as Frenchy; the cynical Englishman whom they addressed as Osman, and Dr. Buckles. Buckles sat on Leggy's side, and as Leggy served him he murmured softly:

"So this is your job! New to it, ain't you?"

Leggy smiled as a servant might. A feeling of uneasiness went through him. This man was too noticing.

Leggy's observations of Fay were necessarily confined to her profile and back. Her thinness hurt him. It was no climate for white women. Her bright red hair was rolled up on top of her head, and the sight of the escaped tendrils curling at the nape of her neck almost brought the tears to his eyes. That soft and childish neck that he had once been used to enclose within his hands!

The whole thing seemed like a dream, it was so unreal. All this phony elegance in the depths of the jungle; men and women in evening dress, sipping champagne out of hollow-stemmed glasses, with the crude roar of the camp coming faintly through the windows.

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The discipline imposed on a waiter steadied Leggy. As the meal went on and he realized that there was almost no chance of being recognized by Fay, his head cleared. It was necessary for him to learn the inwardness of the situation and he applied himself to watching and listening.

By degrees a number of things became evident. Firstly, the terrible Blacktower was hard hit. He lowered his head when he addressed Fay and his rocky face softened in spite of himself. Secondly, all the other men, Duke Hammill, Frenchy, Osman, and Buckles, were likewise in love with her and jealous of Blacktower. Thirdly, Manoel and Pepita were keenly aware of Fay's value to themselves, and were on the alert to prevent any man from stealing her. They were full of greasy confidence. Fourthly, and this made Leggy burn inside, Manoel himself was infatuated with Fay, and was only restrained by fear of his wife, who was as jealous as only an aging woman can be.

AS to Fay's own feelings, he could not tell. He had never understood her. All he could see was that she was enjoying the moment like a child. She was like a pale plant brought out of the cellar into the sun. Occasionally he saw her checking her laughter, and glancing uneasily at either Manoel or Pepita. She was no better than a prisoner. What was he himself but a prisoner?

During the meal Blacktower endeavored to keep Fay engaged in low-voiced talk with himself, but the other men would not stand for it. One or another of them was continually drawing her into the general conversation. A thing that comforted Leggy was that they all treated her with respect. There was no loose talk around the table. He heard Blacktower murmur to her:

"Having a good time?"

"Oh, yes!" b r e a t h e d Fay. "Only—"

"Only what?"

"It will be over so soon."

"It needn't be," he murmured meaningly.

Leggy felt as if somebody had squeezed his heart strings, so real was the pain. How can she stand out against him? he thought.

"Oh, Miss Rosadora," Buckles sang out from the foot of the table, "you ought to come see my menagerie. One of my patients brought me a little black monkey today. Serious-minded chap. Would you like to have him for a pet?"

Fay did not answer immediately, but looked at Manoel.

"That would be very nice," said Manoel with his oily grin.

Buckles scowled.

"What do *you* say?" he asked, pointedly addressing Fay.

"I should love it."

None of the men paid any attention to the other two girls. They seemed not to resent it, but drank more champagne than anybody else, and babbled to each other back and forth across the table.

Blacktower got Fay's ear again.

"This camp is no place for a woman like you," he murmured.

"I know it," she said simply.

"How did you happen to come here?"

"I didn't know we were coming here. My contract with Manoel said the leading cities of Brazil."

"Before signing the contract you ought to have found out if he was a scoundrel."

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"I had no one to go to . . . and he offered a good salary."

"Is he paying it?"

"No. He says he's keeping it for me."

Blacktower scowled. "Do they ill-treat you?"

"Oh, no. They leave me alone." Leggy saw a little shiver pass through her. "But it's horrible!" she murmured.

"Manoel will never pay you a cent," said Blacktower.

"Then what am I to do?"

"Leave it to me."

These low-voiced talks made Manoel restive. His wife was watching him like a lynx from across the table. His yellow eyeballs rolled viciously towards Blacktower. Finally he said, "Rosadora, sing a little song for the company, dearie."

"Be quiet," said his wife. "It is not the time for singing."

Manoel subsided, flushing darkly.

Nobody wanted music, it appeared.

THEN there was Duke Hamill, the handsome skinny little gambler, trained to a finish by danger. He raised his glass. "Drink with me, Miss Rosadora," Blacktower scowled, but Hammill coolly faced him out. "Happy days!" he said with a conceited air.

The continual interruptions made Blacktower sore, and as soon as the ices were eaten he pushed back his chair. They all went into the main room that Blacktower called "the salon," and George served coffee there. Leggy cleared the table. Soon afterwards he heard them drift across the bridge to take a flyer at the tables in the front building.

Leggy was gathering up the coffee cups in the salon when Blacktower and La Rosadora unexpectedly returned. His retreat was cut off and he began to shake. But the girl never looked at him.

"Bring fresh coffee, a bottle of Benedictine and glasses upstairs," ordered Blacktower.

Leggy's head reeled. Upstairs! He couldn't face it. In the pantry he tried to persuade George to go.

"Not on your life!" said the Hawaiian.

"It won't make any difference to him."

"Sure, it won't make any difference to him. But he told you to bring it, and if everything is not done exactly as he says, he raises all hell."

Leggy climbed the stairs with his knees giving under him. There was only one room on the second floor, surrounded by a narrow balcony and open to the air on all four sides. This was Blacktower's private apartment. It was lighted only by a single lamp under a colored shade. Fay was sitting in an easy chair under the lamp, and Blacktower had drawn up a small chair where he could look into her face. His back was to the stairs. Fay had the diamond bracelet in her hands and was examining it wistfully.

Leggy had to put his tray down on a large table by the head of the stairs, fetch a small table and place it before them; then return for the tray. The couple were oblivious to him.

Fay handed the bracelet back. "I'm very sorry. I can't take it," she murmured.

"I went all the way to Manaos to get it for you, you know," said Blacktower.

"Oh, you only say that," she returned, with a bleak smile.

"It's the truth!"

"There would be no use in my ac-

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cepting it. They would only take it from me."

"Take it from you?"

"Oh, on one excuse or another... For the sake of keeping it safe," she added, with her wry smile.

"How long are you going to put up with this?" asked Blacktower.

"Will you pay my fare to New York?" she countered.

"You ask too much of me," muttered Blacktower. "I'm only flesh and blood."

"Then, what else can I do?" she said, spreading out her hands, "except put up with it?"

"Come to me," said Blacktower.

Leggy, with lowered head, was in the act of placing the tray on the small table before them. He wondered that they did not hear the loud beating of his heart.

Fay did not answer immediately.

"Isn't this a nice room?" asked Blacktower. "Away from all the filthy muck."

She mutely nodded.

"THIS should be your room," he went on. "All yours. You would be provided with a key to the door, too. Could a man offer you more? Here you would be safe from Manoel and his like. You would be surrounded with all the comforts that a pretty woman is entitled to. Plenty of servants to wait on you..."

Including me, thought Leggy.

"No, I cannot," said Fay.

There was no further excuse for Leggy to linger. He started slowly down the narrow stairs.

Blacktower said, "Don't you want your coffee?...Perhaps you'd rather have an ice?" He raised his voice. "William!"

Leggy returned.

"Fetch Madame an ice."

Leggy flew to the pantry. Chou and George were eating their dinner. When he gave his order, his breathlessness made them stare. Chou's deliberate movements nearly drove him mad. In two or three minutes he was back in the upstairs room.

They were sitting as before. He judged, from Blacktower's attitude, that he was pleading his case hard. Fay was listening with downcast face. Her hand lay limply in Blacktower's. She's going to give in! Leggy thought, with a stab in his breast. Well...what else can she do?

Blacktower was saying, "Manoel enjoys power here because of his connection with the Governor of Amazonas. We have to keep the Governor in a good humor. So we send him a handsome present every month through Manoel. If you come to me, Manoel will run to the Governor with his complaints. It's risky because these grafters can always raise up race prejudice against us Americans; but I'll chance it. I can prove that Manoel is grafting off his boss. And On Kai Ling will stand by me. He pays a bigger export tax than anybody in the state."

"I am not worth so much risk," murmured Fay.

"You are worth all a man has!" murmured Blacktower.

There was a silence. Leggy, between the two of them, was removing the coffee cups and placing the ice before Fay.

"Manoel is a foul beast," Blacktower resumed. "He means you no good. If it were not for Pepita...I guess you know it. Women have their instincts."

"Yes, I know it," said Fay, very low.

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Another silence. Leggy had finished his task.

"Then you must come to me," said Blacktower with quiet assurance. "The present situation is impossible."

Leggy, behind Blacktower's chair, paused for a second, glancing at Fay. He saw her lips tremble. He knew she was about to give in. Yielding to a desperate impulse, he took off the dark glasses, and holding them up, he made believe to be looking through them. The fluttering of his hands attracted the girl's attention. She looked into his face...

He had thought her pale before, but now her face became as white as paper. Even her lips changed color. But she was game; no cry escaped her.

Leggy, afraid that Blacktower might turn around, walked slowly to the stairs and went down. He had played his only card. The thing was out of his hands now.

CHAPTER IV.

A SILVER DOLLAR.

LEGGY was not sent for again. The party broke up early because La Rosadora had to do her turn before the show ended. Blacktower went across the bridge with the guests, and did not return; consequently Leggy had no way of knowing how the situation had turned out.

The uncertainty was more than a man could bear. Sleep was out of the question. Having marked the kitchen shelf where Chou kept his private store of rum, Leggy took a long pull while the Chinaman slept. But there was no forgetfulness in the stuff now. This thing had to be faced out. He tossed in his hammock while the night dragged through, his hot brain endlessly traveling the same ground like a squirrel in a revolving cage. He did not return to the bottle. In the end the sun came up, as it will do.

On ordinary occasions Blacktower remained in the gambling hall most of the night, and did not show himself downstairs until noon. Today he appeared before eight o'clock. Leggy was still sweeping the salon, while George gathered up cigarette butts. A single glance in Blacktower's sour and yellowed face was enough. The boss had not slept either. Leggy's heart rose up like a balloon cut loose. Everything was all right so far!

Out of pure viciousness Blacktower launched a stream of curses at the heads of his two servants. He had a searching tongue.

"Kitchen lice! Lard bellies!"—these were the mildest terms he used—"Are

JACK BEATTY

you obliged to raise hell down here in the mornings? Do you think it's funny to spoil my sleep?"

George and Leggy silently faded through the pantry door. This did not suit Blacktower.

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"Leggy! Come back here!" he roared.

Leggy returned to the room.

"Did you hear me speaking to you?"

At the moment Leggy felt no fear of him.

"I heard you," he said.

"Say *sir*, when you speak to me!"

"Sir," said Leggy, keeping a straight face. He was thinking: That's all r i g h t, old man; you got turned down last night! You got turned down, and you're sore!

"Don't give me any lip!" shouted Blacktower. "You're only here at my pleasure. You got no rights. If you rile me I'll step on you like a centipede or any other vermin!"

Leggy said nothing.

"I asked you a question when I came downstairs."

"I didn't know we were making any noise," said Leggy, adding "sir" after a couple of seconds.

"You didn't know it! Hell, what *do* you know? I ought to have left you swilling in the gutter, you sewer rat! You were at home there!" And so on. And so on.

Leggy kept his eyes lowered. It was sweet after his night of anxiety to hear the big boss giving himself away.

When Blacktower had exhausted his vocabulary he strode across the bridge. "I want my coffee in ten minutes," he called back.

When they heard him shouting for his coffee, Chou said with a grin, "Which boy goin' carry it?"

"I stood up to him before," said Leggy.

"Aw, go on," pleaded George, turning yellowish. "I'd spill it all over him, my hand trembles so."

"All right. I'm not afraid of him."

Blacktower's mood had changed. He paid no attention to Leggy, when the coffee was brought to him.

He sat at the dining table, staring down at the cloth with knitted forehead. Leggy put the coffee cup down beside him, and he started stirring it without looking up. His thin lips worked on themselves.

Plotting, thought Leggy, and his sense of satisfaction was suddenly chilled. Blacktower had men and money behind him; he was practically the king of the place. Who was to stop him from doing what he pleased?

"What the hell are you standing around for?" snarled Blacktower.

Leggy went back to the kitchen. In an hour or so Blacktower shouted for Leggy from upstairs. Leggy found him sitting at his desk. He had written two letters which lay sealed and addressed beside him. There were two small packages with them. Blacktower's confidence had returned. He said, with his usual sarcastic grin, "I want you to deliver these two letters and packages."

One of the letters was addressed to Senhora Pepita Carvalho; the other to Senhorina La Rosadora.

Leggy turned wary. "Where do they live?"

"Where do you suppose, you fool?" said Blacktower. "In the hotel back of the theater."

"Do you want answers?"

"That is as may be."

LEGGY picked up the letters and packages and turned to go.

"Wait a minute," said Blacktower. "There's more to it than that. You are not to hand that stuff over to any servant, see? You are to say that you can only put it in the hands of the ladies themselves. You will not be allowed to see Rosadora, but you can say

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it anyhow. You are to keep your eyes open when you're inside the place; that is what I'm sending you for.

"The letters are only a stall. I don't give a damn whether they're delivered or not. But when you come back I'll expect a full description of the layout of the place. Use your detective skill. I want to know where Pepita's room is, and the girl's room. I want to know if Rosadora is allowed any freedom, or if they keep her locked up. And especially what other ways there may be of getting into the house and of getting into her room besides the front door. Do you get me?"

Leggy nodded. "If I had a little money I might pick up something from the servants."

"Good," said Blacktower, grinning. "You show almost human intelligence." He poured a handful of coins on the edge of the desk, and Leggy scooped them up. "Go on," said Blacktower. "Say nothing about where you are going to the other servants."

Leggy smiled to himself as he went over the bridge.

The street of Bom Successo at eleven o'clock in the morning was not a pretty sight. The fierce still heat had already descended. The drinking places were all open, but though Leggy had money jingling in his pocket it did not occur to him to enter one of them. Other things on his mind. No one appeared to be stirring but the *caboclo* water-carrier. Men lay in every corner sleeping it off. Their own mothers would have turned from them in disgust.

Some were stretched across the middle of the road, and Leggy stepped over them.

Just beyond the wooden theater the street took a turn to the right, and Leggy was faced by a heavy wooden gateway. It stood in the middle of a stockade of palm trunks taller than a man's head, plastered with mud. Alongside the gate was nailed a crudely lettered sign reading: HOTEL. Leggy pounded on the gate and waited. No sound came from the yard within. He alternately pounded and kicked on the gate. Blacktower's commission gave him the assurance to make plenty of noise.

While he waited he looked about him, fixing everything in his mind. Over the top of the stockade he could see the second story of a long adobe building with a row of windows having no sashes, but filled in with dirty mosquito netting. Outside the middle window there was a small balcony. This building joined on obliquely to the rear of the wooden theater. From the configuration of the land it was evident that both buildings overhung the creek on the other side.

The hotel was the last building in camp. Beyond the gate the road lost itself in a patch of waste land, then the forest wall.

The gate was finally opened by a native girl. To Leggy they all looked alike: brown masklike faces, glassy eyes, dumpy figure in a faded cotton dress, bare feet which left a print almost rectangular in the dust. Before he could speak she said, "Too early. Come back tonight."

Leggy saw red. So that was the sort of joint where Fay was kept prisoner! He hesitated until he could steady his voice. "I've got a letter for Senhora Carvalho. From Torrenegro."

The girl merely looked blank.

"For Pepita," he said.

She showed a spark of intelligence, and held out her hand.

He shook his head. "I got to give it to her myself."

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HER face became like wood again. They stared at each other until Leggy thought to produce an American half-dollar. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Ria." She snatched the coin and put it in her mouth. She let him in and fastened the gate by dropping a bar across it.

The narrow courtyard was empty, and filled with a rank growth of dusty weeds in the corners. One side of it was bounded obliquely by the back of the theater, one side by the squalid hotel, and the other two by the stockade of palm logs.

As he followed the girl into the house, the beating of Leggy's heart made him dizzy. He was afraid of suddenly coming face to face with Fay. They entered a good-sized room with windows on the far side overlooking the creek. When the building had been a bona-fide hotel, this had been the lobby and dining room. Fay was not in it, and Leggy got a grip on himself.

Telling him to wait, the native girl disappeared through a doorway on the left. The door hung by one hinge, and could not be closed. Judging by the smell that came through, the kitchen lay that way. The room was full of flies. At a long table in the back two slatternly white girls were sitting, one picking at her food in an indifferent way, one humped in her chair staring into space. They cast a look of dislike at Leggy, in which there was nothing personal, and paid no further attention to him.

A corridor opened in the side of the room opposite the kitchen door, and by making a step forward Leggy could look down it. Four doors, all closed, opened off it on the creek side of the building. Opposite the doors a dilapidated stairway ran up alongside the wall; Leggy could not see up it. There was a bend in the corridor at the far end. He figured that this must lead into the back premises of the theater.

Presently he became aware that Pepita was squinting at him through the crack of the kitchen door. Making up her mind that he was a person of no account, she came forward, brazening out her appearance. Without stays or make-up she looked horrible. She paused to curse the girls for showing themselves in such a state. They got up listlessly and Leggy presently heard them going upstairs.

With a suspicious look, Pepita demanded to know what Leggy wanted. They talked together in the mixture of Portuguese, English and Quichua that passed current in Amazonas. He handed over the package and envelope that were addressed to her. She looked at the other package.

Glancing over her note indifferently, she sneered when she opened up a little silver gilt box with an enameled cover. Blacktower's ruse did not deceive her.

"What's that?" she demanded.

"For La Rosadora."

"Give it to me."

"Blacktower said I was to give it to her."

"You can't see her. She's sleeping."

"I'll come back later," he said woodenly.

The fear that he might have to meet Fay under the eyes of this woman turned him clammy.

"You can't see her any time," she said. "She don't want to see anybody."

He breathed more freely.

"Well, give it to me," she said, holding out her hand.

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"Will you give me some writing from La Rosadora to show Blacktower?"

"Sure."

PEPITA carried the girl's package back into the kitchen. From the shape of it, it was a book. Is Fay in there? thought Leggy. No! The woman wanted to take time to read the note and run over the pages of the book to make sure there was not a second note hidden in it.

He was now alone in the dining room, and he moved a few steps towards the corridor with the idea of exploring a little further. He wanted to see what was upstairs. But the sound of a turning handle made him draw back quickly. The first door in the corridor opened, and the fat figure of Manoel appeared wearing pajamas; yawning and scratching his bald pate. Leggy's bristles rose at the sight; Manoel, taken aback by the stranger, snarled silently.

He paddled on to the kitchen with an ugly look. A loud quarrel arose out there. It was carried on in Portuguese, but it was not difficult to comprehend that Manoel was accusing his wife of carrying on an intrigue behind his back. Her answers were contemptuous.

After a while Pepita reappeared with Manoel shuffling after her. Pepita was carrying the book, now unwrapped, with Blacktower's note sticking in it. Leggy could read the title as she passed: "The Cardinal's Snuff-Box." Strange, coming from Blacktower! But the gambler was full of contradictions. For a pet he kept a little Pekinese spaniel, as if he were some society dame. Anyhow, Blacktower was a gentleman alongside the beast Manoel.

They passed Leggy without looking at him and entered the corridor. Stopping before the last door, Pepita took a key from her pocket; and Leggy shook as if he had a chill. *That* was Fay's room! She was literally a prisoner! He could picture the face of terror that she turned, hearing the key in the lock!...Keep cool! Keep cool! he thought. You'll have to stand for worse than this!

Pepita and Manoel were quarreling again. They kept their voices too low for him to hear, but he understood that Manoel wanted to go in with her, and Pepita was forbidding it. Leggy was all for the woman then. He moved closer, keeping behind the corner of the opening.

Listening hard, he heard Pepita say, low-voiced and furious, "You go into your room or I'll take the girl to Blacktower myself, and who's going to stop me!"

Taking a slant around the corner, Leggy saw Manoel slouching back to his own door. Pepita went into Fay's room. A surge of relief flooded through him. For a moment the coarse figure of Pepita appeared to him in a beautiful light.

He waited, standing in the musty dining room with his senses all alert. Time passed. Myriads of flies crawled over the littered table. Overhead he heard a pair of listless feet dragging themselves across the floor.

Later, Ria came in from the kitchen and started gathering up the dirty dishes. Leggy thought: I ought to leave a friend behind me in this house. He drew out the rest of the coins Blacktower had given him and poured them into the girl's hands.

She promptly transferred them to her mouth since she had neither pocket nor stocking, and a sparkle of intelligence came into her glassy eyes.

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From that time Leggy never had any difficulty in distinguishing her from the other native girls. She was bought.

Nothing was said between them. She went out with the dishes, and he continued to wait.

FINALLY Pepita appeared with an envelope addressed to Blacktower. At sight of the angular, ladylike characters that he knew so well, Leggy shivered. She had addressed it to "Mr. Blacktower." The ink was scarcely dry. The note came almost warm from her fingers to his. Luckily, his dark glasses baffled Pepita's hard glance. He bowed to her politely, and left.

Ria followed him across the yard to bar the gate.

Back under the crazy palm awnings of the "Avenida," as they called the main street, Leggy loafed along to give himself time to think things out before facing Blacktower. As noon approached, the camp was coming to life. Men lined up at the bars for a hair of the dog. Finding an unoccupied keg in front of a rum shop, Leggy sat down on it. Loafing never made you conspicuous in Bom Successo. He would have been glad of a drink, but had neglected to save out the price.

He decided to give Blacktower an exact and truthful account of all he had observed. Unless he did so, his boss would not continue to employ him in this matter; and unless he knew what Blacktower was up to he couldn't hope to block him.

Before going home Leggy struck down the path in front of the theater, and slouched across the swaying bridge. On the other side lived the lowest type of *caboclos* in their squalid palm huts built on shaky platforms in the mud. It was said to be as much as a white man's life was worth to venture amongst them alone.

Leggy did not linger, but came back over the bridge, covertly studying the hotel from the rear.

Simple enough to pick out Fay's room. It was the first on the ground floor next to the theater. The rooms on the back had no doubt been planned as the best in the hotel. There was a double gallery running along outside, divided by heavy, ventilated partitions. Thus each room had its private veranda. This gallery was built out from the bank on tall piles driven into the mud. Fay undoubtedly slept on her veranda.

The creek, at this season of falling water, was no more than a sluggish ditch winding through a wide expanse of stinking mud, littered with rusty tin cans. However, there was sufficient water to float a canoe. No easy job

MANOEL

to climb up to the gallery, but it could be done. It was screened in, but metal screening offers no serious resistance to a good knife.

Back at home, Leggy gave Blacktower a matter-of-fact account of all

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he had observed. The tall man listened, leaning back in his chair with his hands clasped behind his head and his feet on the desk.

He gazed out of the window as if the matter was of no great interest. But apparently he was pleased with the morning's work, because in the end he produced a silver dollar and flipped it in Leggy's direction.

Leggy let it lie where it fell. Something hardened inside him. He thought: I've made myself necessary to this brute; it's time now to make a stand.

Blacktower stared at him in amazement.

"Aren't you going to pick it up?"

"No."

Blacktower turned pale with rage, and his eyes glittered like a snake's. He sprang up with raised fist as if to strike Leggy down. Leggy faced him out, and the blow never fell. Once again a suggestion of fear appeared in Blacktower's eyes. It was gone immediately; his look became calculating and propitiatory.

"Well, after all, you're a white man," he said. "Living amongst these greasy swine, a fellow forgets the difference.

"Go get your dinner," said Blacktower. His voice was smooth, his glance murderous.

Leggy was not deceived by the voice. He went out, leaving the silver dollar lying on the floor.

CHAPTER V.

STRANGE WHITE MAN.

LEGGY as a house servant had the best possible opportunities for watching Blacktower. He was nearly always in a position to say where his boss was and whom he was with. As a matter of fact, the gambler seldom left his own establishment except between the hours of nine and eleven at night. That was before heavy play began at the tables. At this time he would be in the theater. Leggy never succeeded in scraping together the price of admission to the theater, but he had the camp gossip as passed on by the Hawaiian boy to go by.

"La Rosadora's straight as a string. Manoel and Pepita figure that she pays them better so. Every night when she's not singing she sits at a table in the hall with Pepita beside her. Pepita never leaves her. It's what they call a duenna in this country. Any white man who has the price is free to sit down at the table and talk to La Rosadora.

"Drinks at that table cost five dollars gold. Lately, they say, our old man has been engaging the whole table and keeping the others off. There's trouble brewing with the other white men because of it."

"Why do they stand for it?" asked Leggy.

George looked at him in surprise. "Blacktower is the boss of Bom Successo."

Always in the back of his mind Leggy was mulling over the complicated situation. For the moment Blacktower appeared to be pretty well up against it. He was in a position to pay a price for the girl that would square Pepita; and as for the other white men he was undoubtedly ready to tell them to go to hell; but Manoel's infatuation for Fay stood in the way of his making a deal.

Manoel, in his turn, couldn't reach her because of Pepita. A man's own wife is his most formidable antagonist. She has his number. Obviously, Pepita was the key to the situation. But for

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how long? In a place like Bom Successo what was there to prevent a man from suddenly removing a person who stood in his way?

Leggy wondered if the woman was alive to her danger.

Powerful as he might be, Blacktower could expect no help in this project from any other white man in camp. Leggy took a certain comfort in that thought. If there's a kidnaping plot afoot, he'll have to use me! It brought him squarely up against his job.

The first essential was to procure a gun. It was in his mind every hour. Gun seemed to come between him and everything he looked at. Blacktower's extensive arsenal was under careful lock and key. No hope of prigging a weapon from him. There was a brisk barter in guns always going on in camp, but Leggy had nothing to swap with. Well, when a man's pockets are empty, he must trade with personal service.

He set about making friends.

The Hawaiian boy, the Chinese cook, the four gamblers who lodged in the house—you never knew who might be useful—he studied them all with a view to winning their good will. Not by sucking up to them; that would only have been to get himself kicked; but by facing them out, and taking everything in good part. Not too easy a job for a man who had come into the house despised by all.

On the outside, the two white men with whom he came oftenest in contact were the Englishman, Osman, who ran the ice and electric plant, and Doc Buckles. The first-named fancied himself as a wit, and the way to get next to him was to show a keen appreciation of his humor.

Buckles was too sharp to have anything like that put over on him, but as Leggy had a real liking for Doc it wasn't necessary to study how to make friends with him.

When he was drunk Doc was a valuable source of information. He seemed to recognize by instinct that the close-mouthed Leggy wouldn't give him away. He liked to have Leggy come drink with him in his stifling little laboratory between two rum shops on the Avenida. There he could rail against Blacktower without any danger of being overheard. Doc often worked in his laboratory far into the night. He was trying to isolate the organisms that caused the diverse and dizzy fevers of that country.

Always Doc's tirades would end with a similar cry: "But you can't touch him! He has us dead to rights!"

"Why?" Leggy asked him one day.

The answer was the same as he had received before: "Blacktower's the boss here."

"How did he get to be boss?"

Doc grinned sardonically. "Ever read Darwin, sprinter?"

"No."

"Case of natural selection. There ain't a man in camp can face Blacktower out when his black eyes glitter. And every other white man is obliged to back him up."

"Why?"

"TO keep the *caboclos* under. God, how they hate us! And there is only a handful of us. If they got out of hand and stormed the rum shops, the camp would go up in smoke and we'd all get our gizzards slit." He illustrated graphically. "Come on, drink up! I'm two ahead of you."

Leggy only sipped his rum. He

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couldn't afford to get drunk any more.

"A year ago last Christmas," Doc went on, "things got so bad here we had to take measures. There were twenty-two men killed here in twenty-four hours. Made quite a scandal. The Governor sent word popular opinion would force him to clean us up if we didn't put on the brakes. So we formed a law-and-order committee.

"Every American and Englishman, except the bums, is on it. All the Brazilians with money in the camp are with us too, but we don't let them on the committee. Blacktower was elected chairman or mayor or what you will. He has the power, and we are pledged to support him. Everybody in business pays the committee for protection."

"Just like home," said Leggy dryly. "Who gets it?"

"The committee hands it to Manoel Carvalho for the Governor. Manoel is the Governor's spy here. Tries to put the fear of God in us by holding the troops over our heads. But as Blacktower has evidence that Manoel himself is grafting off the Governor, it preserves a kind of even balance—see?"

"And if the balance is ever disturbed?"

"All hell will break loose," said Doc cheerfully. He tossed off his rum. "What are you grinning at, prancer?"

"I was thinking that in Manaos they call Bom Successo the free town," said Leggy.

"Yeah. And when those poor chumps arrive here, they find a cast-iron government; of Blacktower, by Blacktower, and for Blacktower!"

"If he takes this girl, will the committee stand for it?" asked Leggy with an indifferent air.

"If she goes to him willingly, nobody can say anything," said Doc gloomily. "If he undertook to take her by force—"

"Well, what?"

"God knows! Reckon we'd all blow up together in one big bang!"

"Well, she's turned him down," said Leggy, glancing up to see how Doc would take it.

He put down his glass carefully; his glance sharpened.

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"She's refused the diamond bracelet; he still has it."

Doc grabbed up Leggy's hand. His eyes were shining.

"Boy, that's the best news I've heard in a month of Sundays! I knew she was on the square!" He suddenly burst out in wild laughter. "Jeese, what a bloody fool I am! One would think I stood some chance there myself! What is it to me either way?" His voice broke; his head dropped on his arms, and his shoulders began to shake.

"I'm drunk!" he muttered. "I'm drunk!"

"Well, I know how it is," said Leggy woodenly.

SOMEBODY from Blacktower's had to go often to the store, and Leggy took over the job from the lazy Chou. There were twenty-five rum shops, more or less, in Bom Successo, and one general store, On Kai Ling's. The rubber warehouse was his also; the store adjoined it. Originally a crude 'dobe hovel, it had been added to from time to time until the buildings covered upwards of an acre. Somewhere in the middle of it the old Chinaman lived in oriental splendor, it was said, but no white man had ever been in to see.

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On Kai Ling weighed more than three hundred pounds, but he could carry it, for he was six feet four inches tall. An elephant of a man in his long robe of blue brocade and round black cap. His face was good-humored, his hands soft and well kept. All day long, whether there was any business going or not, he sat inside the door with a little table before him bearing fan, tobacco pipe, and writing materials, ready to issue his scrip for rubber. The rubber was handled in the warehouse next door. On Kai Ling's little I. O. Us. could be exchanged for gold in any bank in Brazil, it was said. Or he would pay gold if it was demanded.

He employed an indefinite number of felt-shod clerks who could not be told apart. They were said to be his nephews. Outside of business they had not a word to say, and they were never seen off the premises. Amidst all the disorder of trade goods that stacked the place, they could instantly put hand on anything that was asked for. It seemed as if a man could buy anything in the world at On Kai Ling's, even rich velvets, silks, ivory fans, ostrich feathers, and gold jewelry, if he happened to get stuck on a girl.

Leggy eyed the old man every time he went in and out, wondering how he could get next to him. On Kai Ling and Blacktower were said to be in partnership on almost everything—steamboat, rubber business, gambling house—but their relations when they met were merely formal. The one partner paid gold or scrip for rubber; and the other took most of it back in his gambling house. Very convenient arrangement. The exact terms of the partnership were not known.

Leggy thought: If I could once get him talking, he might take a liking to me. Old men love to talk. But, naturally, being only a house servant, he had to watch his step.

One afternoon Blacktower sent him with a note to On Kai Ling. The merchant dictated an answer to a clerk; and while they waited for it to be written out he started talking of his own accord.

"Blacktower treat you good?" he asked, with a sly Chinese smile.

Pulling my leg, thought Leggy.

"Nothing to complain of," he said.

"Got sore eyes? I got eye medicine."

Leggy reflected that a good way to make friends with a man is to offer him your confidence.

"It's only a stall," he said. "Don't give me away. There are men here who have it in for me."

"Merchant never give away," said On Kai Ling, laughing silently.

Leggy tried a little flattery. "You do a big business here, Uncle Ling." (Such was the common pronunciation of his name.)

The Chinaman shrugged. "Business is good while it's good!"

"I hear the men say that the rubber comes to you because it is known on all the rivers that your scales are true."

"I got give good weight," said On Kai Ling, smiling, "because I too fat to run away."

"You were the first one here, weren't you?"

"Yes. I build store on this point because it is hidden, but not hard to find. On right Madeira River; on left Purus; little way in front Amazon. Nobody come in this little river unless they lookin' for me. I build up my business quiet. When the big men get on to me, see? I am as big as them. Now"—with an expressive wave of

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his hand Uncle Ling included the whole camp—"the purse-suckers are here. That is nothing to me. I buy rubber."

The next time Leggy came into the store On Kai Ling said without any preamble, "What Blacktower pay you."

"Nothing," said Leggy.

"You work for me I give two hundred dollar a month; board you outside."

Leggy slowly shook his head.

"Can't do it, Uncle Ling. But it certainly is white of you."

"I not white," he retorted, with his Chinese smile; "I yellow."

Leggy was embarrassed. "Well, you know what I mean."

"Why you won't work for me?"

Naturally, Leggy was not giving his real reason. "When Blacktower picked me up in Manaos I was down and out," he said. "It don't seem quite square to shake him the first chance I get."

"You good boy," said On Kai Ling. "I tell Blacktower you good, loyal servant."

"Better not," said Leggy cautiously. "You can't be sure how he'll take a thing."

"All right. I say nothing. You pretty smart boy," he added, smiling. "Know your master."

"When a man's up against it," said Leggy, "he'd damn well better sharpen up his wits."

"Sure," said the old man, coolly, "but few do."

"Well, it took a hell of a kick in the pants to bring me to."

Uncle Ling shook in silent mirth. "You good boy. I like."

Leggy struck then and there.

"Will you sell me a gun?" he asked eagerly. "I'll pay for it as quick as I can. Blacktower shells out a dollar from time to time. And you know I can't get away from here."

UNCLE LING looked at him, screwing up his eyes until they almost disappeared, and rubbing his chin.

"You know how it is here," Leggy pleaded. "A man has got to look out for himself. Blacktower sends me all around camp for one thing or another. I never know when I'm going to hit trouble. Without any means of defending myself, I feel like a woman."

"All right," said Uncle Ling. "I sell."

He spoke to one of his nephews in Chinese, and Leggy left the store with a practically new Smith & Wesson .32. Big enough to do his business, but not big enough to look boastful. He felt like a man made over.

One of Leggy's jobs was to fetch ice in a wheelbarrow morning and night. On his night trip, as he turned out of the ice plant with his load, he heard a creature breathing in distress, and set the barrow down. This lower end of the camp, with its little plaza between the Chinese outfit and the ice plant, was quiet and deserted after nightfall. The hum of the generator was louder than the racket up street.

He saw a man lying on the ground pressing himself against the ice-house wall in an attempt to hold the terrible shaking that had him in its grip. It was not an unusual sight in Bom Successo.

He had only a few dirty rags of clothing on his body. He was sun-baked to such a degree that it was only by his matted beard that Leggy knew him for a white man.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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"Your name?" demanded Oyster-Eye

Sorcerer's Treasure

Long Novelette

By ANTHONY M. RUD
Author of "The Stained Tabu," "White Fires," etc.

He played a grim game of murder—in a country where there was little chance of vengeance of the law—for a stake beyond price

CHAPTER I.

FEAR OF THE OGRE.

ROCKY GHEE might have beaten me to death that time, for he was drunk. Tied to the whipping post back of the sawmill, I had fainted under blows of the blacksnake.

It was by no means my first beating, but it was my last at the hands of Rocky Ghee. I was fourteen years old, big for my age, bound out (or as they say in Alabama, "bonded") to work at a wage of $5 for Rocky, all the months until I turned twenty-one. He never paid me one cent.

There were no reasons for the beatings, outside of the fact that about

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This would be a fight to the death

once a week Rocky got drunk on shinny. And, of course, I tore into him desperately and fruitlessly every time he hauled out the blacksnake, trying to annihilate him with my fists before he could get negroes to tie me.

This time I awoke prone on the ground. A girl I knew of (rather than knew) named Marjorie Grandeman, was bathing the deep, bloody welts on my back, and weeping softly.

"He'll never do that again! Poor boy!" she kept saying over and over. "When you feel better, read this. *He* sent it!"

There was a different accent on the last pronoun. Instinctively I guessed the person she meant, and tiny chills came down my arms. There was, not far away in the heart of the piney-woods, an awesome personage whom the blacks and Cajans spoke of in whispers. He was a *sorcier,* a worker of magic. More than that, he was supposed to right all wrongs. All you had to do was send him a pig or a chicken, dressed for table.

Your troubles would vanish, and your enemies bite the dust—only, I had never owned a pig or chicken I could have sent.

The girl left me hurriedly as I sat up, staring glassily at the crumpled letter. It was addressed to Rocky Ghee. Evidently he had read it, stopped the beating, crumpled it up and dropped it

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there as he went for more drink. It warned:

Quit beating that boy, or I shall send a horror in the night to seize you and bring you to judgment!
Old Oyster-Eye.

Just how even the brutal lumbermen felt about crossing that unknown sorcerer, who was said to dwell in a cave of skulls in the north hills, can be seen by the fact that even Rocky Ghee was shaken. Though eight months more elapsed before I got hold of a little money, and made my escape from the camp, he never touched that blacksnake to my back again.

It did not alter my feelings toward him. Sometime I was going to kill him with my hands. I did not guess that already a horror had come more than once in the night, beckoning to him with grisly finger, and that I was to be cheated of the vengeance for which I would work and plan for several years.

Just a word about myself. Before I was born, my father, Charles Lamont, deserted my mother. My mother died when I was a month old, with only three or four hundred dollars in her possession. I spent from then until I was twelve, at an orphanage school. Then the law said I had to be bound out, until I reached my majority.

My mother had been a great beauty, a Cajan girl educated in France. For years I kept her picture, until it yellowed and faded out completely. Why or how my father could have deserted her, I could not guess.

When I got away, and finally reached Chicago, I got a job at $6 a week doing odd jobs around Hayworth's Gym. This year and two more like it are not important, except I went to night school down on Clark Street, and put on the gloves with somebody, every day at the gym. Pug Hayworth got so he'd match me for a couple of rounds with some of his business men amateurs, who weren't so hot. I went under the name of Carter, up there.

Then one day he came to me and said, "Kid, that lousy so-and-such, Brackett, has stood me up on a prelim down to East Chi, t'night. Wanta take a four round lickin' for twenty-five an' carfare?"

Naturally I cut school that night, and went. Pug was surprised when I got an easy kayo in the second. So was I, but did I eat it up! I meant to be a fighter who could kill a man with his fists, before I went back to Alabama!

FROM that time on I was a ham-and-beaner, though I kept my gym job two years more. The scraps helped. I was broadening through the shoulders. Then, two years later I put on the tape and gloves in the Milwaukee Auditorium in a semi-final. Johnny Dundee and Willie Jackson, lightweights, were fighting the final, but I never saw that bout. A 230-pound punk named Sailor Grundy, a Limey, had put me asleep for two hours. I didn't feel too bad about it afterward, for I was just shading 180, those days. I did do a lot more studying for a while, though.

Boxing right then was under the kibosh in Chicago. So I got some matches out in Saeger's Arena, in Aurora.

Good practice, but there wasn't much money in it for a heavyweight. Pal Moore of Memphis, Frankie Schaeffer and his kid brother, and the new flash, Sammy Mandell, were fighting there at Saeger's, and turning all the fans' interest toward lightweights. Sammy became world's champion a little later.

But I got along without a manager

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now, and saved every nickel I could get. The month I was twenty-three I had four thousand in the bank, a junior college diploma from Lewis Institute, and a sore ear which wanted to cauliflower. I declared myself a vacation, and went down to Alabama to kill a man. The four grand, I figured (having seen how it worked around Cicero, Burnham and Chicago) would be about right to pay a lawyer to get me free afterward.

You know how the woods grip you, after you've been away? I took some long breaths, and felt myself grow, when I started out to find Rocky Ghee, the man I wanted to kill.

Rocky had died of too much green shinny, nearly three years before. My carefully planned vengeance was a fizzle.

Just chance kept me from going back north and taking some more shellackings in semi-final bouts. I met an invalid named Shapley, who had a five-acre citrus and pecan orchard in the pine hills north of Citronelle. The Choctaws, Cherokees and Creeks used to send all their sick braves to this exact spot; but history does not tell how many of them recovered.

The place was doing Shapley no good at all. He offered me his excellent cypress cabin and five-acre place at a give-away price. I bought it and he went to Arizona. I hope he recovered, though I never heard a word from him.

I had no taxes to pay. This sounds funny, but it was true. My new holding was north of the Mobile County line, in Washington County. To an Alabaman that tells the story; Washington County in that year did not even have a sheriff, and of course no tax-collecting organization. It had practically no population of white skin. Chatom was the so-called county seat and biggest metropolitan center. Chatom had a population of less than 200, even if you counted all the pickaninnies carefully. Most of the people of the woods were Cajans, who held their squatter cabins under shotgun title, and did not live in towns to any extent.

The Cajans were and are Choctaw Indian and Acadian French, the people of Evangeline. They are intolerant of whites and negroes alike, suspicious of both.

Therefore, as became extremely important, law in Washington County was fully as primitive as anywhere on the North American continent.

GHOSTS and women never had meant a thing in my life. There was only that one queer experience with a sorcerer, who probably had saved me from being beaten to death. Why he had done it I had failed to guess.

Now ghosts and women—and spectral treasure—were to step right in and take charge of me!

Of course I had no suspicions of that. I was feeling up-stage and important, with my little five-acre orchard. I had made one trip down to Citronelle in the ancient Ford I got from the invalid Shapley. Then I had spent seven luxurious days as a landed proprietor, working as much as I wanted in the trim orchard, all surrounded by stout, nearly new "hog-tight" fencing, against the razorbacks and piney-woods cattle which range free all winter long.

Everything was in excellent shape, due to the care of the big buck Negro, Lonnie. Lonnie was as tall as myself, and outweighed me thirty pounds. He was a magnificent specimen, carved out of solid night and with face and naked torso seemingly oiled with liquid light-

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ning. What a fighter he would have made!

I kept Lonnie for the cultivating; and I promised myself that I'd try to teach him enough ring science so I could have an occasional friendly bout. I set him to work scrubbing the four room interior of the cypress cabin with antiseptic soap. Until it was thoroughly cleaned and aired, I slept in an old Army tent I brought from Mobile.

Twice when Lonnie went down to bring up buckets of water from the river, I noticed that he crouched a little, and stared upstream quite as though he feared something might leap at him from that direction. I asked him a little sharply what was wrong, but Lonnie shook his head and said nothing. He never was one to talk.

I recalled from boyhood days the story of that big, undergrown jungle of a place, known then as the Grandeman estate. There was a big wooden mansion of a house, set amid terraces, artificial ponds, and groves of gray bearded live oaks from which the Cajans cut the spheres of mistletoe to sell at Christmas.

I vaguely remembered that this woods retreat had been built by a wealthy white man who had been in some sort of trouble with the law up north. He had lived in the place only a year or two, and then had committed suicide by slashing his throat with a razor. Since then no one had dwelt there. Even Cajans avoided it; and the blacks would not go near what they called the Cunjah House, even in daylight.

The thought stayed with me, and next day it seemed to be a good idea just to take a ramble over the old place. With an unloaded shotgun under my arm and few shells in my hunting jacket, I went out to the fence, just a little way beyond the spot where Lonnie was working, banking up hills of compost around the roots of cumquats rather recently grafted on the tough and thorny trifoliata. I had a sulphur candle burning in the cabin that day, and neither Lonnie nor I would enter till next morning.

I had set my gun carefully through the fence, and was just about to vault over, when I heard rapid footsteps behind. Then big Lonnie came up, clutching at my arm.

"No, Boss! No, Boss!" he pleaded in that deep, mournful voice he used so seldom. "Don't go *that*away!"

"Why the hell not?" I grinned. "Ghosts all run away from me. These marks were all made by men!" I touched my rather flattened nose and cauliflowered left ear.

BUT Lonnie was not joking, and it was not ghosts he feared at this moment. I had a hard time getting out of him what he did mean. And then I got a sort of eerie thrill, my own self.

"Ah tell yo', Boss," he finally blurted out with sepulchral frankness, *"Ol' Oystah-Eye done lib da'!"*

"The devil!" I said, astonished.

"Yessah, Ah specks he is!" croaked Lonnie, and trudged slowly back to his work, casting one backward glance over his glistening shoulder to make certain I was not venturing across the fence.

I did not venture. This surely was something for thought! Here, living right next me, if Lonnie was correct, was that queer individual who had saved my life!

I must confess that I did not feel any particular gratitude toward him. In the days after that last beating, I had found out all the mill men knew

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about him. They pictured him as a monster, a wrinkled, ugly old devil with one white eye and one black eye. Usually he looked at you with the black one. When the white eye turned toward any miserable, shivering wretch, that unfortunate fell down frothing in conniptions, and died.

They had told me his Cajan name, too, but right now I could not bring it back to mind. La—Laverne? No, that was not quite right. But no matter. I'd remember sometime.

According to rumor, Old Oyster-Eye had dwelt in a strange cave filled with skulls of the men he had bewitched. He had been accused of making figures out of red clay, and endowing them with life for a single night. He was served by black zombies, dead men he had resurrected for his foul purposes.

Just superstitious rot, of course. But it certainly was true that he possessed power, and that sometimes, at least, he exercised that power to prevent injustices.

Certainly this famed magician had not lived at the Grandeman place in my youth. I got a kick out of the thought of having him for a neighbor; but even at that I hesitated to wander over casually and make his acquaintance. Since he was Cajan, his greeting to one whom he thought a damn-Yank trespasser might well be a charge of chrome-nickeled buckshot.

In the work to be done I shelved Old Oyster-Eye for future consideration, little knowing how suddenly my everyday affairs were to be interrupted unpleasantly by him. On the following Saturday, with a list of provisions and hardware as long as a hog's hind leg, I sent Lonnie along to his woods cabin with a week's pay, and drove down the fifteen miles to Citronelle.

The first six miles were hard driving, through a maze of narrow and obstructed wood roads leading this way and that through heavy blackjack and gum forest. Shapley's old Ford climbed over fallen trees, scraped between stumps, and managed to make it. On the way I blazed about eighty trees, since I was not at all certain of being able to find my way home after nightfall.

The last nine miles were easier. The road was little more than a pair of ox-cart ruts, but it was marked with the white, gold and white triple band of the M. V. Highway. A Ford could buck through, although a big machine would go hub deep in sand almost anywhere.

SOON after supper, with my jellopy loaded, I started back north to Washington County. Nothing happened until I was off the highway, following the tree blazes I had made, and thankful for them.

Then I swerved around a tree, cutting the wheel short—and a gasp burst from my lips. Right ahead, part way up a dark tree bole, someone was glaring a flashlight straight into my eyes!

In a second I laughed mirthlessly, and drove ahead. It was nothing but a bobcat. The beast's eyes had caught the flare of the Ford's headlights, and feline eye-reflectors had flung it back into my face.

Just the same, I got thinking about eyes—one white eye that rarely turned to regard a person—and little prickly chills like quick-melting snowflakes began to play across my shoulders. After dark I felt just as happy not to be meeting the Cajan sorcerer anywhere in the woods. But I was to meet him that night.

Just about half a mile from my

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fenced five acres, where the ground began to slant downward into the deep ravine of Dog River, I saw something across the road. Another fifty yards and I reached it, stopping the car and frowning at the obstruction.

It was a fence, new, and *not* of the hog-tight construction needed for any plantation or orchard because of the Alabama herd law! This was a tight strung barrier of four barbed wires and brown, freshly peeled cedar posts. There was an iron-pipe gate, also wire-strung, the width of a car; but it was chained and padlocked now.

I began to get angry. This was the road to my home, the nearest and best one. What right had anyone to fence across it? Whoever owned that padlock was going to find it broken in the morning! I went into a side pocket of the puddle-jumper, after a small ball hammer I carried there.

I was getting angrier. That fence had not been there when I drove down to Citronelle this forenoon! Anyhow, what good was a barbed wire fence here? It would keep out cows, but not the all-destructive razorbacks which are so bold and savage they will walk right in any open door and chew up chairs and tables if they find nothing more succulent.

I lifted the hammer, aiming at the big Yale padlock I placed with its chain on top of a length of gate pipe. My arm froze at the top of the stroke. Four dark forms had risen to their feet close to me!

Four big Negroes. They wore chambray shirts and ragged overalls; barefoot, of course. They had no guns that I could see. And they said nothing, which was unnatural and ominous. Just waited—for me to whang that Yale lock and unchain the gate!

The fence was between us, and I let it remain so for the moment. The realization had come suddenly that this was the old Grandeman estate, the edge of it, and these blacks were without doubt the servants of that weird person, Old Oyster-Eye!

THEY were flesh and blood, of course, not the zombies of superstitious rumor, and I did not fear any or all—as long as they did not produce guns. Still I hesitated. I wanted to know more about this before I started the doubtful enterprise of mopping up on four muscular men, no matter how untutored. In the direct glare of headlights from the still running Ford, I probably could hand around kayos easily enough; but if one of the four wanted to steal around into the shadows and tackle me from behind, I wouldn't have a chance.

So I held to my temper. "Why is this fence here?" I demanded sternly. "I have to use this road to get home." This was not absolutely so; another, more roundabout road existed, but I had no intention of trying to find it this night or any other time.

The four colored men stood silent, waiting. I did not like that one bit, and repeated my question more sharply, at the same time dropping my right hand to the holstered Colt pistol at my thigh. A wise man never goes unarmed in the woods at night. Or in daytime either, unless he is right in his own dooryard.

Only one of the four blacks showed uneasiness. This one, on the left end of the line, shifted his feet and coughed apologetically. I concentrated on him, demanding an explanation. Finally he looked furtively over his shoulder, and said huskily:

"Ohdahs of de boss, sah! Nobuddy comes in thisaway!"

"And what are you going to do

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when I smash this lock and drive through?"

"Th'ow yo' all an' de cah in de swamp!" came the husky but determined reply. It decided me. I raised the hammer again. I had been tolerant, but this was just too much.

Crash! The lock broke, the chain came away. I swung wide the gate. The blacks just stood there—waiting!

Then I saw two new figures. At least I thought I saw two, and I was right, though only one came directly from the shadows of the brush, up to the gate. I caught one glimpse in the light of the lamps, as the Negroes melted out of his path. And I turned back in the gateway to face the man a thrill all down my spine told me must be the piney-woods sorcerer, Old Oyster-Eye!

PIERRE LAMONT

Heaven only knows what I expected to see. Probably a greasy, long-haired, buck-toothed ruffian with an evil leer, and a cataract over one eye. Cunning, even sinister cunning, is not lacking in Cajans; and I had put down this creature as one who surpassed his fellows in chicanery and the implanting of fear. I know I was ready at once to despise and to fear some dirty trick he might play upon me if I crossed him.

I give my word I was completely punch drunk from what I did see. Walking quietly with poise, a bareheaded man with a glorious mane of snow white hair, a white mustache and a triangle of chin beard of the sort known as Van Dyke, came straight toward me at the fence. He was wearing a dinner coat and black tie, probably the only specimens of this costume to be found nearer than the city of Mobile!

He was not more than five feet ten in height, but carried himself as erect as a West Point martinet. And I saw a thin, long nose, chalk white skin quite unlike the golden tan which is Cajan, and two eyes like none others I have ever seen.

One was jet black, a sparking onyx jewel beneath its bushing snow-white brow. The other diverged a little, not much. It was not a blind eye at all, just a freak in color. That night I thought it white, with the pupil indistinguishable and the iris light gray; but that was the effect of the headlights. In truth the whole eye showed a curious purplish gray in sunlight, with one black dot in the center. That was the pupil.

"I UNDERSTAND that you have the cabin next to this land, Mr. Shapley," said a deep, resonant voice which seemed to come from far down under his spotless shirt front. "And I must apologize for this treatment. You are a sick man? You do not look it!

"However," he went on, before I could find words to correct his impression, "I have taken over this place next to yours. And since I desire no com-

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pany—not *any!*"—those words suddenly crackled—"I have fenced the land. After tonight, you cannot come through here. I believe you have another road. Tonight—"

"Pardon," I said caustically, finding my voice. "I do not know your name, but mine is not Shapley. I bought him out, and am living in his cabin. Did you purchase the old Grandeman place?"

"My name does not matter," he said stiffly. Somehow the news that I was not the invalid Shapley appeared to make a big difference in his attitude. "And I am living at Grandeman's—no matter under what circumstances. I forbid trespassers, and am in a position to enforce my commands!"

"Then I'm to understand you won't let me through—now, at night, when I have to go ten miles around, and probably get lost?" I demanded hotly.

"Exactly! I know why you have taken the Shapley place, young man. You and the rest may as well go back to Atlanta and New Orleans or wherever you came from. I am warned!"

And with that the old fellow flipped a hand under the shiny lapel of his jacket, and came up with a shiny short-barreled revolver!

He likewise took two measured strides forward, his black eyes burning into mine. I turned sidewise to scrutinize him, not a little puzzled and thrilled. Old Oyster-Eye had gained in stature, as far as I was concerned; and oddly enough I was not in the least inclined to take his threat at less than face value.

He meant it. What the stuff about Atlanta and New Orleans could signify, was far beyond me; but there was no doubt at all that if I insisted upon getting home by this short road, I was going to have a fight to the death. And perhaps I did not even have right wholly on my side!

In mid-stride the old man stopped. He even blinked and made a queer, gasping sound. Then the shiny revolver slowly came up to breast height, leveled, aiming at my heart!

"Your name?" cried Old Oyster-Eye with electrifying tenseness.

"Why—James Carter!" I replied, almost stammering.

"You lie! Damn you, you lie!" Now the deep voice was quavering with inexplicable rage. "Get out of my sight before I have these men tear you to pieces! Get *out!*"

He flung up his right arm, and probably from the convulsive anger which consumed him in that maniacal moment, he pulled trigger. A spurt of fire angled upward into the trees. The darkies gasped and groaned in unison. All four of them crept forward, crouching, and I saw them. What on earth did it mean? They were coming like four black apes, ready to rend me where I stood!

I was shaken. Perhaps this old *sorcier* was mad. I did not wait to analyze. In that moment I honestly think I should have struggled like any untutored savage, if the blacks had set upon me. I had been scraped clear down to the roots. The matter of a road to my place no longer seemed important.

I turned the Ford. I was stepping on the gas, anxious to get away and think over all I had heard and seen. But the white-maned sorcerer came up to the running board. He leaned in, and his black eye glowed red like a rabbit's—but unlike a rabbit's in every other way!

"You name is—Lamont! *Or—should—be!*" he grated. "I should slay you out of hand, but I shall not!"

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The last words were spoken in French, which I understood.

"Yes, it is—Pierre Lamont!" I whispered. "How do you know?"

"Go. Or die," he said, slowly raising the revolver. "Oh, damn you to hell, *go!*" I went.

CHAPTER II.

GHOSTS AT GRANDEMAN'S.

THE homeward trip was irritating and tiresome. I had to go back six miles to the highway, north then to Tiger on the railway, pick up a Cajan guide, then thread a way among the faint, aimless wood roads which seem to persist a long time after the reason for their being has vanished.

So by the time I paid off the Cajan, and got out to lower a section of my own tight fence for passage of the Ford, I was half blind from lack of sleep, and savage at what I now considered my mistreatment.

The queer, magnetic hold which that white bearded oldster had exercised upon me had vanished. Even the fact that he recognized me as Pierre Lamont did not seem strange any longer. After all, he had been a power in the woods at the time I was a bond boy slave; and it might be that my appearance had not changed as greatly as I imagined. Or—and here my jaw set broodingly—Old Oyster-Eye might have known my father. If so I meant to wrest the secret from him somehow.

If I ever met the man who had been my father, who had left my mother to die in a charity hospital, and his son to be reared a Cajan orphan and bond servant to bullies of the lumber camps, that man would have to talk fast and suavely to me. Or a reckoning would descend upon him.

Knowing the dark thoughts which held me were largely the result of being thoroughly tired and dirty from the long, hard day, I climbed stiffly out of the car, undressed in the cabin, and went down for a dip in Dog River. The water felt far too cold, but I clamped my jaws and lathered. Then one final plunge and furious swim the length of the hole and back, and I waded out to towel myself and get ready for a few hours of slumber.

The towel around my waist, I turned to go up to the cabin. Suddenly there came a screech of agony or superhuman terror, throttled into horrid choking sounds which presently ceased! Unarmed, naked except for the rough towel, I crouched and stared upstream —toward Grandeman's—into the inky blackness of the further bank.

Then over my whole body crept shivery chill which had no reference to the temperature of the night. Over there, quite a way up the bank, a whitish, half luminous figure appeared! Another—in all, four of them! They came out of the brush silently in single file; and somehow, either because of the robes they wore, which were white and seemed to exude phosphorescent light, or because my eyes had become accustomed to the obscurity, I could see them as tall, faceless entities in robes, hooded and bent a little forward as they walked.

They only appeared, and almost instantly disappeared into a tunnel of underbrush; but in that long five seconds I had seen that two of them carried something limp and horizontal —a human body! That was only a guess, but I was sure of it.

Silence. I waited a full five minutes, wondering just what I had seen happen. These figures looked a bit like those of the robed and hooded Ku

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Klux Klan, whom I had seen once on parade in Citronelle. They had been powerful in my boyhood, and even now were known to exist and have their secret meetings.

Certainly Old Oyster-Eye, a Cajan, was not a member. Could the Klan have come after him, and was this one of their weird captures I just had witnessed?

Thoughtful, but of no mind to interfere, I returned to the cabin, dressed fully except for my boots, and lay down on my cot bed. Within a space of minutes, despite every throbbing question in my brain, I fell into deep sleep.

When Lonnie woke me I smelled coffee, and the early sun was sending light yellow rays through the window on a slant. Sometimes Lonnie did come early enough on Sunday to get breakfast; that meant usually that his Saturday night crap game had resulted disastrously.

BUT I was to learn that hunger was not what brought him this Sunday morning. As a kaleidoscope of yesterday's strange events flashed through my still sleepy mind, I noted that Lonnie's complexion was purple—which was as near to turning pale with worry and fright as one of his color skin could come. His eyes showed whites all around the irises, and his deep, melancholy voice was oddly thickened.

"Boss! Boss!" he said urgently, seeing me trying to wake. "Dey's a one heah fo' to see yo'! One fum *dat* place!"

He did not need to specify. With an exclamation I leaped up, wondering if I was being waited on by the white-maned sorcerer.

"Where is he?" I asked, hastily splashing water into a basin, and washing my face.

It proved that my visitor was feminine, though Lonnie did not enlighten me. He merely pointed off to westward beyond the trodden, grassless door-yard. There was a six-foot clump of pink-belled mountain laurel, but no sign of a visitor. I looked doubtfully at it; but somehow the morning sun chased the fears of night, and I strode forward, beginning to frown. I wanted to know several things, and Old Oyster-Eye had better begin to enlighten me right about now.

"Mr. Lamont!"

The truculence whished out of me like burning powder out of a Christmas firecracker squib. I stared, halting involuntarily. The girl who had been seated there on a fallen log got up and looked seriously at me.

A girl! She was clad in lace boots, breeches and open-neck shirt of new khaki, and she looked almost overweighted with the fluffy red-brown mass of marcelled hair above her small, oval face. At first glance I knew who she was, and that is why I could see her clearly enough to describe. Her name was Marjorie Grandeman; and she had dark blue eyes, strange eyebrows that seemed only as wide as a horsehair (plucking them was a new outrage at that time), and a rather wide mouth carefully reddened until it seemed to be bleeding. Her nose was uptilted and irregular. I thought she looked shocking, in spite of the wistful, grave air of greeting.

I was to get used to the cosmetics in time, though.

"Yes, Miss Grandeman?" I answered, conscious of a funny warm feeling in my cheeks. She looked at me, startled, and I hastened to add: "I used to live near here, and I remember

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you when you lived down in Citronelle."

"Oh, I see. I—don't remember you. But no matter," she went on. "I came to tell you I—I was there at the gate, last night. Grandfather is furious. He—I'm afraid he may do something to you. I felt I had to come and ask if—well, if you couldn't go away somewhere."

Something in my face must have showed her how foolish was any idea that I would leave this place which I had just bought, and run away, merely because Old Oyster-Eye had become my neighbor. The fact that Marjorie Grandeman called him her grandfather, and that she was either daughter or granddaughter of the man who had built this mansion in the woods, and then committed suicide, complicated matters for me. It also seemed to show that Old Oyster-Eye was in possession of the place rightfully enough.

His name, I dimly recalled now, was Lavoisier. He might have had a daughter married to the northerner, Grandeman. Probably that was it.

Miss Grandeman shook her head. "I didn't think you would do that," she admitted, before I could speak. "But there is a war on, you know. Or don't you?" The thin brown lines of eyebrows arched in question.

"There's going to be," I said wryly, "unless I can get right of way through on that road! But you meant something else, of course. No, I had no idea that anyone at all lived at Grandeman's now, or that the estate still was in the family. When I saw you, years ago—" I stopped, almost biting my tongue. I had remembered more about this girl. She had been left penniless, and had been taking care of three children for some people named Bayliss, although little more than a child herself.

"You were right enough," she admitted quietly. "Granddad does not own the old place. He says shotgun title is the way of the woods. I—I can't cross him any way, now he seems to be in awful trouble, particularly. You see, I owe him my education—everything!"

QUIETLY and with a straightforward frankness at variance with her oddly artificial make-up of face, she told me in a few words how she happened to be living here. Going straight from a finishing school, and from summers spent with her father at racing capitals of the world and gambling resorts like Cannes and Monte Carlo, into the drudgery of housework and the care of three children of a poverty-stricken piney-woods white family, had been too much for her health.

After a year she had been pale, sick, emaciated and out of even that meager means of keeping soul and body together.

Then it was that Lavoisier came, quietly offered the assistance those of her own race had withheld; and she had been overjoyed to accept.

Good clothes, money, a respectable widow to act as chaperon in the city, a year of preparatory school, then Tulane University. And this summer was the first time she had revisited the woods. She had graduated, and meant to try for a stenographic job in the city; but old Lavoisier had not cared for that. He asked her to come to the woods for this one summer, after which he thought he might go to live abroad, and take her with him. She had not been able to refuse, although she had come quite believing that he was relatively poor; that he had strained all his resources to give her

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the education and comforts she had enjoyed.

Her surprise was not unmixed with horror to find that she came back to a house of queer, somber luxury—and the very house in which her own father had committed suicide!

"I don't know *why* he came to the old place!" she finished in a hushed, earnest voice. "I have only Mrs. Colman with me—the lady I lived with in New Orleans. And we're afraid to breathe most of the time! He has a number of blacks who work for him at something, and *never speak!* I have begged him to let me go back and work in the city, but he just shakes his head. He's kind to me—too kind. I—well, I—think there's something wrong. Something *besides* the fact that he's afraid; that there have been men trying to get at him and us, in the house!

"There was a regular fusillade of bullets came through the downstairs windows one night, smashing them and wrecking things in the rooms. A machine gun, I think!"

"For heaven's sake!" I said, impressed. "You're sure it just wasn't one of those black men—guards—he has, letting go a Tommygun by mistake?"

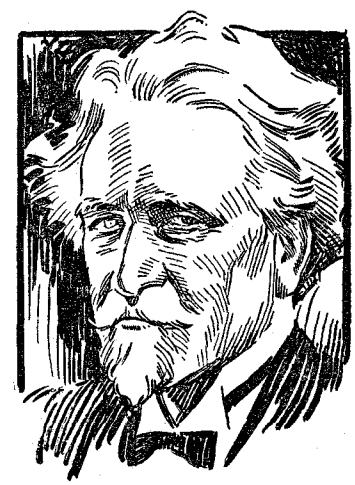
She shook her head, smiling wryly. "Positive!" she said simply. "You see, there are no firearms on the whole place. He won't have them."

"But I saw his pistol, and he let go a shot!" I objected.

"Oh, that. Just blanks. He won't have lead-loaded guns of any sort on the premises. He keeps that revolver loaded with blanks, in his own possession. It's just for signalling—or for scaring away a rattler that happens to get in the path.

"No, Mr. Lamont, grandfather—I call him that—has other means of protection. I don't know what they are, exactly. I—I'd rather not know!" She shivered slightly.

"MR. LAVOISIER had a reputation as a worker in black magic long before you knew him," I said dryly. "I fully expected



OLD OYSTER-EYE

to find him in feathers, skins, ochre paint and clacking a pair of human shinbones for castanets, like an old Choctaw *mingo*. The dinner coat had me on the ropes."

"I wish—well, I don't suppose you'd consider going away for just a while?" she asked, moving to go back to the fence. "No, I suppose men are that way. I have to get back. He'll be looking for me, or Mrs. Colman will. The house was queer and quiet this morning—breakfast all ready for me, with hot coffee on the stove, but not a soul around. Mrs. Colman doesn't get up until nine or ten; but I never knew grandfather to go away without saying so. And the blacks are away, too."

"Miss Grandeman!" I interrupted. "Something queer happened last night,

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after I got back here. Do you know what it was?"

When she shook her head, I told in brief of the happening I had witnessed. She just shivered and looked anxious, but was not at all surprised.

"There have been—things like that before," she admitted. "But I really must go. You will be careful? Take the other road, when you go out? I—I would be rather glad to know there is someone here I—" her face began to color in a fashion which shamed the rouge.

"Call it friends, Miss Grandeman," I said, extending my rough paw. She accepted gratefully, and smiled. Funny, as she turned and skipped to the fence, vaulting over just like a boy.

I hated to think of her having to stay in that old ruin—a place reputed to be haunted even before Old Oyster-Eye came—with that white haired maniac and the speechless blacks. Even a staid widow, such I imagined Mrs. Colman to be, would not be much comfort or protection against enemies of the woods sorcerer who came with submachine guns.

I resolved to talk things over plainly this very day, with Lavoisier, and try to convince him that I was not on the side of his enemies—or not until I saw some genuine reason, beyond the matter of the fenced road.

But how to get at him? How to send even a message? I regretted immediately that I had not written, and given the letter to Miss Grandeman, but it was too late now. On guard against enemies who would do as senseless and cowardly a thing as fire bursts of submachine bullets through the windows of a house where dwelt two helpless women, Lavoisier surely would have a watch set against me now. He knew where I lived. Probably those speechless blacks were somewhere in hiding, ready to leap out and seize anyone who ventured across the fence. That scene of last night might have been four Negroes in robes, carrying away a prisoner to dump him in a swamp honeycomb, where his body would be cared for quickly by the alligators . . .

Here was not a place for strong arm methods, I realized. Somehow I would have to get that letter to Lavoisier immediately. Well, no matter how frightened of the Cunjah House and its occupant Lonnie might be, he would have to get in touch with the black guards. They would not harm him if he went waving a flag of truce, and gave them my message to take to Old Oyster-Eye. But when I returned to the cabin, Lonnie was gone.

CHAPTER III.

THE TERROR THAT CREEPS.

IT was hard to understand. He had not drunk coffee or eaten breakfast; and normally Lonnie was my notion of one of those gastronomic giants old Rabelais wrote about. Lonnie was always hungry; I have seen him calmly stow away half a loaf of bread, six cold stuffed quail, two giant skillets full of bacon rashers, a dozen scrambled eggs, and a half gallon of black chickory-coffee (he added the chicory himself, to my rather extravagant forty-cent coffee, because he liked the flavor) just as a mild Sunday morning snack.

To come on Sunday like this, argued something peculiar. To leave immediately, while I talked to Miss Grandeman, meant simply that Lonnie had been frightened. Some sense of duty had made him get me out of bed, but then his courage had failed.

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I frowned, sat down and wrote my careful message to Old Oyster-Eye, put it in an envelope, and then set out for Lonnie's woods cabin. He was going to have to help me out here, no matter how scared he was.

Not to be poky about it, the trip over and back simply wasted an hour. Three big-eyed pickaninnies played there at the doorstep of the unpainted shanty; and the mother of one of them was there, immediately alarmed when I demanded her man. She did not know where he had gone, if not to my place. I left a curt word with her for Lonnie to come on the double-quick, the minute he showed up.

I never was to see Lonnie Beejum again alive.

Of course I did not guess that. Annoyed and disturbed, I thought of getting the eldest toddler of Lonnie's three-mother brood to carry my letter; but then I dismissed the idea as cowardly. Good heavens, was I letting this nonsense of a conjurer and his mad ideas get me down?

By the shortest route through the woods, which brought me out to the hanging foot bridge over Dog River, and then to the road and gate where I had been stopped the previous night, I hurried to the Grandeman place. I see I have forgotten to state that at one place on Grandeman's and at one place just beyond to westward, it was possible to ford Dog River—but not in the spring rainy season. This was the end of summer, and fords were practicable.

The iron pipe gate was chained, and a new padlock held it. I went straight up, and shouted: "Come! I want to speak to someone at Grandeman's!"

I waved a handkerchief in lieu of a white flag, and held the envelope with my letter in the other. I had my short-gun in holster, but that would not deter Old Oyster-Eye, I knew.

Twice more I shouted. The air was breathless, humid and warm. Beads of dew still dripped from the gray beards of hanging moss, and the lethargic sounds of a forest grown old in waiting for the clean ring of an axe, came to me in an occasional plop or slow rustle of the underbrush. Right over there on my side of the fence a five-months fawn, just losing its spots, fed unconcernedly; but for a long time nothing came from the house. No sound at all, which was ominous.

I called to the Negroes, but none came forward. Impatient at last, ready to risk almost any sort of happening just to see Miss Grandeman and make sure she and her elderly companion were all right, I put a hand on the nearest cedar post, intending to vault.

At that second out from the brush at one side of the faint wood road a small, sidling man came in a hurry. He was short, spare, but nattily dressed—except for a cap which he wore cocked up and sidewise. He was all in gray, and for a moment I saw no sign of a weapon; but then I saw a bulge in the right side pocket of his jacket. Then I knew.

He was a southern edition of a sort of fellow I had seen at the ringside at Aurora many times—and also the one time I fought at Burnham, Illinois, which is not far from Cicero. Not a killer in his own right, not even really a gangster, this was the sort of suave, ingratiating little man used almost always as a messenger by men who do not mask their killer instincts readily.

A coward, of course but probably nursing certain ambitions to be a Boswell to big shots. The sort of man who will kill—but only when he is sure that he is safe, and that his master earnestly desires the death.

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"Oh, there you are, Mr. Lamont!" he exclaimed breathlessly, smiling and exposing a gap where two teeth were gone from his upper jaw. "I heard you. Mr. Lavoisier can't come just now, but if you want to come up to the house and wait just a few minutes."

"I don't," I said curtly. "Will you please send Miss Grandeman or Mrs. Colman here? I have a message for one of them."

"I'll take it," he offered eagerly.

"Sorry. It's personal. I'll wait till one of them comes, if you don't mind."

"But I do mind!" he said. "I don't want to see you sitting out here at the gate all day and all night. You see, the two ladies have gone down to Mobile. I think they'll be back sometime tomorrow afternoon."

DOWN inside of me came the momentary shiver and drop which I was to know far more about—the first inching forward of a terror which was to be even more real because it was strictly not my business, and because I had no right in the world to appoint myself the keeper of a girl I had seen twice and spoken to once for ten minutes.

However that may be, I knew that Miss Grandeman had not intended to go to Mobile when she spoke to me only ninety minutes earlier. During all the days I had been on my five-acre place, I had not once heard the unmistakable sounds of a starting motor over at Grandeman's. A car may arrive silently; but even the best ones make a certain amount of noise when being started. I did not think that Old Oyster-Eye had a car.

In short, I did *not* believe that Miss Grandeman and Mrs. Colman had gone to Mobile!

But if not, why could not one of the two come out to see me? And where was Lavoisier and his blacks?

I feigned denseness. "Well, tomorrow will have to do, I reckon," I said, shrugging. "Are you visiting Mr. Lavoisier?"

"Yes, helping him with his experiments," nodded the little fellow brightly, albeit his eyes shifted quickly. They returned to mine instantly, though, and then held their level gaze with an ingenuous steadiness which ought to have deceived me, but for some reason did not. "My name is Jackley; Bertram Jackley."

"I see. Well, tell Miss Grandeman I called, and want to give her a message. She knows where I live."

With that I turned away, strode along the fence and around the end of it. There was a prickling between my shoulder blades, where I felt oddly certain that little man wanted to put one of his bullets. But he did not try to do it. Probably, like most sneak killers, he was not very deadly with an automatic at any distance above ten feet.

And there was another reason right then why my death was not desired, though I had no idea of it. Had I guessed why I should not be murdered out of hand by some lurker of the thickets, oddly enough I should have felt more worried rather than less so!

Back at my cabin I took position at the side of the one window which looked out toward the rear, where Dog River flowed. A deep apprehension filled me, and the hunch had grown that over there at what Lonnie termed Cunjah House some queer and horrible business threatened the girl, Marjorie Grandeman. She had not gone to Mobile with Mrs. Colman, unless someone from the city had come up unexpectedly to fetch her. That might be. But I had an unreasonable certainty deep

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inside me that if Marjorie had been leaving, she would have come over to repeat her warning, and tell me where she was bound. I felt instinctively that there was a sort of bond of fellowship between us.

I loaded my double-barrel Parker with No. 1 buck, and donned Shapley's wide web belt heavy with shells which had been there since deer season. Then I went forth to make a circuit of the barbed wire fence Lavoisier had erected.

ALMOST immediately came a discovery. This fence did not enclose the whole Grandeman place —naturally, since I just recalled the fact that if it had not been cut up, it comprised about three hundred acres, probably a half-section of forest. Most of it had been cut over in the vandal days of 1905-1910, when portable mills went through, taking only the choice timber but felling much more which was left to rot. Only near Dog River ravine and my little fenced orchard was the forest virgin.

The four-wire fence crossed the road, of course, and then ran for a short distance around to join my own hog-tight barrier. There it ended. There was no mistaking the conclusion. Lavoisier had intended to stop traffic over his land and to my cabin, and gave no thought to other neighbors!

Also, when he had built that fence he had imagined me to be Shapley, an invalid. For a sorcerer his information was rather out of date.

My woodcraft was rusty from years in and near Chicago, but I followed the fence back more or less in the direction of Lonnie's cabin. God forgive me, I was thinking of handing him a stiff punch on the jaw when I caught up with him.

It was not until long after the affair of Old Oyster-Eye was finished, that I discovered what had made Lonnie come to my cabin and wake me this Sunday morning, then hurry away without even a cup of coffee to warm his gizzard. But the truth I didn't know was that at dawn two truculent men had routed him and his woman from sleep, and subjected them to a snarling questioning concerning myself. Of course the woman, Ceely Baxter (by courtesy Mrs. Beejum, after the easy way of the woods), had been too frightened to tell me this when I started in to growl about Lonnie.

There did not seem to be any sign of life anywhere on the Grandeman place. I wanted just a glimpse of one of those dumb guards, so I could try sending in the letter by a different route. Since the blacks worked for Lavoisier, they would not trust the sidling little fellow who called himself Jackley. Not unless he really was an assistant of sorts.

Experiments! I wondered with a touch of chill what sort of experiments Old Oyster-Eye might conduct. At night school in the physics lab there had been a fellow named Dreckenbach. He was working on the radio transmission of power impulses.

For amusement he rigged up a bullfrog in the laboratory, so it would hop when he threw a switch. Of course it was just the same principle as the ordinary galvanic reflex, but the wireless part made it look truly spooky.

Earlier I had imagined that the tales of Old Oyster-Eye making figures of red clay and endowing them with life were just the usual voodoo mumbo-jumbo made into the miraculous by superstitious blacks. But since seeing Lavoisier face to face, I could imagine him using hypnotism, for instance, or

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employing up-to-date science in his illusions. The man showed all the marks of a far better education than I had obtained. Why in the world had he chosen to return to the piney-woods, after completing such an education? Surely the mere exercise of power over woods folk could not be sufficient inducement.

Something moved in a thicket just ahead of me. Weapon ready, I waited, but it was only a false alarm. A razor-back sow with five half grown pigs came out, saw me, and fled with a chorus of grunts.

I spent more than an hour looking for one of the black guards, with no success; and even now, thinking of how close I must have come to certain men who were right there in the woods on a deadly mission, gives me chills across the shoulder-blades. But the truth was I saw no one at all; and the fact that I still lived bore witness to the fact that no one saw me.

I had turned back, ready to go to the gate and shout for Bertram Jackley, and take my chances with him, when it happened—the terrible thing which altered every half-formed plan. It brought me to a dead stop with one foot off the ground, frozen with my gun ready, for all the world, I suppose, like a pointer dog getting the hot scent of a huddling covey.

Piercing and horror-stricken, from near at hand, had sounded a woman's scream of discovery and agony! At the time I did not think of the discovery part of it. I heard only the unmistakable feminine tones, and my heart stopped for a split second. Then shouting in half-articulate encouragement, I turned and plunged straight through the streamers of thorny Choctaw rose, the anise thickets and the oak saplings, straight toward the place where I felt terribly certain someone had set upon the two women of Grandeman's!

CHAPTER IV.

LAW OF LEAD AND STEEL.

MY shout evidently disturbed the woman, for I caught a flash of brown in the brush just ahead, as I came plunging like a stampeding elephant.

If there had been some of those speechless Negroes there, they could have waited and closed upon me; and I would not have been of any assistance to anybody. But the only black whom I found in the little glade above Dog River was Lonnie Beejum. And Lonnie was as dead as he would ever be, his muscular throat agape with a horrible wound which had ceased to bleed, though gouts and puddles of red still steamed everywhere on the ground and branches of the bush.

I stopped, looked down, then hastily around me as I yanked out the pistol and set down the shotgun—the latter weapon of little use in a place where branches crowd up to within a few feet of your elbows and your face.

No help would do Lonnie any good. I called once, guessing it must have been his woman I had partially glimpsed as she ran from the scene of crime. But there was no answer. She probably would hide until she saw me depart, then come back to wail over her dead after the manner of blacks.

The open razor in Lonnie's right hand did not fool me at all. This was murder, not suicide. To begin with, my man of all work was a big, lusty fellow troubled only by a few superstitions. I was paying him more money each week than he normally earned in any month. He had no real worries in this world.

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And then, of course, no Negro holds a razor open in a straight line, with thumb and index finger pinching the metal just above the handle. He heels it; and if he wants to cut deep into an enemy, he thrusts the blade a little outward with the knuckle of his second finger. No, Lonnie Beejum had been murdered!

Realizing that Ceely Baxter would bring her friends to help with the mourning and the funeral, I did not wait there with Lonnie's body, and thus delay them. Promising silently to return just to make sure that some disposition had been made of the corpse by nightfall, I slipped away into the brush, and stopped to listen.

Nothing. Lonnie had been killed within fifteen or twenty minutes, probably. There had been a raw scrape on one wrist which meant a rope. No doubt he had been taken to this spot and his throat slit before he could scream. If he had been bound, no doubt they had found his own razor in a hip pocket, and employed it.

Why had it been necessary for him to die? Because he worked for me, and came back and forth near the Grandeman place? It was as good a guess as I could make, and not far from the truth, either.

Stern anger about Lonnie's tragic, useless death mingled now with an inner panic. I *had* to find Miss Grandeman, and immediately! This was Washington County, where there were no law officers upon whom I might call for help. Worse by far than Nature's dictum of the survival of the fittest—only mildly enforced in this land—was the law of lead and steel which the hate and greed of men put forward in place of it. Survival of the craftiest and most ruthless, rather.

Very well. For Majorie Grandeman and her companion, I would revert. There was a considerable amount of Choctaw blood in my veins, and these were my home woods. If I could not get the better of Negro guards, and city nondescripts such as Bertram Jackley, I would *deserve* a sticky end! From now on I was going to be more ruthless than anyone!

I crossed the fence without challenge, and made my way in the direction of the ruined mansion as quickly as I could go from thicket to thicket, making sure that no one was waiting ahead to send a bullet or pattern of buckshot into my body.

The woods, now with the sun climbing to the zenith, were checkered with spots of light. The air was still.

COMING up to the great bearded oaks which surrounded the rambling Grandeman mansion, I found easy cover in spite of the fact that the underbrush thinned. Four of the great trees, spaced out like sentinels posted for the ages, hung their hundred-foot umbrellas almost to the ground. From their lowest branches the Spanish moss depended, making a weird six-foot horizontal zone of dimness through which men could pass by pushing aside the vertical gray veils.

I swung up to a limb as heavy as a stuffed python, leaving the shotgun cached under some ground palms. Little by little, I worked a way upward, taking care to keep my body shielded from observers at the house.

I could see patches of the house; three windows black and forbidding. Glass was knocked out of one of them on the ground floor, possibly by that fool who sent submachine bullets into the place.

None of the wild animals and fewer redbirds were up here. A sepulchral

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silence held every leaf motionless. I found myself perspiring, though scarcely with the exertion. Where could all the people be keeping themselves? I knew, or thought I knew, that at least four Negroes, two white women, Old Oyster-Eye and that sidling little fellow Jackley were inside the wooden mansion. Were they all sleeping after a night of horrid rites and red murder?

I worked along the big branches, toward the house. Now I saw more of it. The place was not enormous save by comparison to the cabins of the piney-woods. It was built like many of the summer homes of New Orleans millionaires at Pass Christian; though in this case a northerner had constructed it as a refuge for both summer and winter.

The house had two sides, separated by a wide hall on both first and second stories. There was a wide front gallery on each of the two floors, screened now with new copper that had not been painted. On each side were two rooms upstairs, and two downstairs.

The central hall downstairs led back to the dining room (which was only one story) and storage loft above, and exactly the width of the hall. Kitchen and servants' quarters were a series of lean-to additions at right angles to the extreme back of the dining room. Thus both downstairs hall (which served as a living room) and dining room got all the breeze there was in hot weather. Upstairs the same was true, though only when a surplus of guests arrived were the bedchambers on the second floor used in summer. Inland Alabama rarely has a really cool day between May and November.

The exterior was in surprisingly good condition, with new brown shingles showing here and there where repairs had been made on the roof. The whole building had been painted white, which was an odd thing indeed if Lavoisier was just a squatter here as Miss Grandeman thought.

MARJORIE GRANDEMAN

Listening, I could hear no sound from the house. Working my way out along a big branch which overhung the roof of the one-story addition where the servants probably slept, I swung down noiselessly and crept on hands and knees to a second-story window.

It was blank, uncurtained. Chancing a look inside I found out that this was just a storeroom, containing three or four trunks, several suitcases and a couple of boxes which looked as though they might contain books.

Luck was with me. The window was unlocked, and raised easily with only a slight scraping sound. A moment later I was inside, listening, ready to give any one who disputed my presence a grim surprise indeed.

IT took me a long while to realize the fact, tiptoeing stealthily out into the upstairs corridor, viewing another empty room, then silently stealing

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down the stairs to the main floor, but I was just making trouble for myself. There was no one at all in the house, upstairs or down! Even Jackley had gone!

For some time I refused to believe it, even going down into the basement to search, and opening every clothes-press and linen closet on both sides of the house.

But while I made some queer discoveries, all right, I found no occupant. The kitchen and sleeping quarters for the blacks were deserted, the beds unmade, and breakfast dishes stacked on one side of the sink, ready to wash.

Lavoisier and Miss Grandeman had their rooms on one side of the main building. These two rooms and the big central living room were comfortably though inexpensively furnished, grass rugs on the floors, and the chairs, tables, dressers and couches mostly of rattan or white painted pine.

I cared nothing for details. Marjorie Grandeman and Mrs. Colman certainly were not around; and yet a dull feeling akin to hopelessness made me certain that no such easy explanation as a day of shopping in Mobile accounted for their absence.

There were no other beds in the house proper, save the twin beds in the room where the two women slept, and a white iron cot bed used by Lavoisier in the other bedchamber. If Jackley indeed were helping Lavoisier with experiments, he must come and go each day.

The two rooms on the other side of the living room downstairs had been made into one by removing the partition. Here was a complete chemical laboratory, with high tables, racks of test tubes, shelves of reagents, Bunsen burners, and an array of flasks and retorts. All was plain and businesslike, with no mysterious apparatus. The only remarkable thing I found was an ordinary barrel half filled with ordinary red clay. Was this the stuff Old Oyster-Eye used in making his figures?

Upstairs on this side one room was bare and empty. The other chamber evidently had been used for drying a crop of pecans, since several open boxes were filled with these nuts, and a foot-deep heap of them lay loose in one corner. They were the finest Schley paper-shells, and I wondered where they had come from, since I was quite sure there were no such trees on the Grandeman place.

They were to play a curious part in the affair of Old Oyster-Eye, though no one guessed the fact until it was almost too late.

My investigation had come straight up against a blank wall. What connection in the world could the murder of Lonnie have with the disappearance of these two women and old Lavoisier? What part did that soapy little fellow, Bertram Jackley, have to play?

Of course matters could not be left like this. Lonnie had been murdered; and affairs were in such shape at this old place that serious fears for the women were only common sense. I decided to get my Ford and hurry down to Citronelle. At that town someone surely would know whether or not a car bearing Mrs. Colman and Marjorie had passed through; the only highway to Mobile is the main street of Citronelle, and machines coming down from the woods are few in number at any time.

If no car had been seen, I meant to get myself a companion. There were three or four young men friendly enough toward me the time or two I had spoken with them since my return

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to the woods. One of them might take on the adventure of coming back and helping me investigate. I had little desire to go to sleep up there in my cabin now, with no guard posted.

THIS plan eased my worry somewhat as I hurried back through the woods, seeing no one and hearing no sounds which would make me think there was any human being within miles. But I was not to go to Citronelle now. The grimmest sort of surprise awaited.

I had crossed the river and climbed the hog-tight fence, careful about the shotgun recovered on my return trip, and was taking a good look at my own cabin for signs of visitors, before emerging to the bare dooryard.

The small, corrugated iron garage was just beyond, and Shapley's old Ford inside. And now sounded from there a long sobbing honk of the horn!

Somehow it sounded like desperation and misery. I know it was not until later that I realized how easily it could have been a decoy. However, taking the shotgun off safety I hurried straight to the garage. The doors stood open; and down there on the threshold was a red splash which could only be fresh blood!

It was old Lavoisier, terribly wounded and crumpled there against the running board. He evidently had crawled up and sounded the horn, slipping back then as his strength failed. He was clad only in shoes, trousers and a shirt which had been white. A wide red stain began between his shoulders; and there was a corresponding stain in front, high at the left. From the tears in cloth I saw at once he had been shot from behind, and the bullet had gone straight through.

He was breathing faintly, though I could not make out any heartbeat. Lifting him gently I carried him into the cabin, hastily barring the two doors and pulling down the window shades. Then I heated some water and some black coffee, and undressed him to the waist.

It was easy to stanch the blood on the outside, with a pair of compresses; but looking at the seamed, chalk white countenance I felt very little hope that any measures were going to do much good. He evidently bled internally, froth appearing now at the corners of his mouth, and showing a tinge of red.

Perhaps the most terrible part of the three hours that followed lay in the fact that I could neither leave him to ask someone like Ceely to send for a doctor, nor could I bring Lavoisier to anything like complete consciousness. The words he spoke did not seem to make sense—at first. And the blood-stained envelope he poked at me, whispering that I must rescue Marjorie and give it to her, contained one single sentence in a pencil scrawl, one which surely sounded like the ravings of delirium! This is all it said:

Marjorie dear, your heritage is black instead of white, and your pet squirrel rejects it with scorn.
J. L.

Now honestly I ask you, what could anyone make of that?

Between my own terrible anxiety over the fate of the two women, my attempts to resuscitate Lavoisier so he could speak and tell me what I must do, it was an anguished time. The old man, no longer malignant, but weak and rambling, when I did get enough of the coffee into him so he tried to speak, would say a few words—only to lapse again into faintness.

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Because there can be nothing but sadness in trying to reproduce these last minutes of one thoroughly misunderstood, I shall give simply the fragments of speech and whisper which I did manage to glean from his lips.

A man named Breen had betrayed him. Breen had been a partner. He had captured Marjorie (no mention of Mrs. Colman). The blackguards were dead. . . .

WHAT this could signify, more than a kidnaping for possible ransom, I could not imagine. But it did not seem that this was the idea. Or at least there was more to it than that. Over and over I begged Lavoisier to tell me where to find them. And I obtained only a mutter about Dog River Cave. If there was any sort of a cave down near this stream, I certainly had not heard of it; but those three words were plain enough. Which way did the cave lie? I repeated the question again and again, but got nothing more. The dying man seemed to think that I knew all about it; or else his mind was rambling.

That was all which bore upon the terrible plight of Marjorie Grandeman and her companion; but there was one other thing which seemingly was wrung from Lavoisier at the very end. For some time his breathing had been bad, and no heartbeat at all discernible. Only the slow and uneven rise and fall of his chest showed that life had not fled. I tried him on a last swallow of the tepid coffee.

Then it was his eyes came wider, and he seemed to struggle to speak. I put an arm behind his head, and saw his black eyes fixed upon me in an agony of striving. Then words came!

"Save her . . . and give her that . . . she . . . understand!" came the hoarse admonition "*You . . . my grandson . . . daughter married . . . scoundrel . . . Lamont* . . . you . . . do this . . . or I'll come back . . . from grave . . . *to curse you . . . !*"

"I'll do it! But *where* is Marjorie?" I cried, quivering with the terrific news I had just received—if it could be true! —but demanding that this last minute be given to helping me search for his ward and Mrs. Colman.

It was too late. Jules Lavoisier, as I later discovered his full name to be, died in my arms.

I was left to my desperate, almost hopeless search, and to the breath-taking knowledge that I was said to be the grandson of this strange, inexplicable character! That instead of being a nameless Cajan orphan, I boasted a father named Lamont, a scoundrel whom my mother had married!

CHAPTER V.

MAN-MADE CAVES.

REASON was all I had to fall back on; and in the first place, reason rejected the idea of any sort of cave in this neighborhood. Southern Alabama is all red clay and sand; and natural caves do not do well in either of these materials.

A little further north, where sandstone and shale push up in the hills, there are said to be some natural caverns where water dissolved out all the limestone which once was present with the other kinds of rock. It was up there that I always supposed the sorcerer, Old Oyster-Eye, dwelt. Some of the woods folk no doubt knew more exactly, but that mysterious cave of skulls up somewhere in the hills had made a good story, and I had believed it to a certain extent.

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Now to find that this *sorcier* had been my flesh and blood grandfather! That explained his recognition, and his violent words there at the gate. No doubt he had disowned his daughter; and looked upon me as another Lamont, to be hated. But why, if there had been a marriage, was Lamont supposed to be such a scoundrel? There never had been a man in the woods by that name in my boyhood. Possibly he had died in prison; and the disgrace of what he had done was so terrible that my mother had preferred to deny her own marriage!

These hectic thoughts consumed me as I covered the old man's body with a sheet, and hurriedly slipped out to begin the search I felt was well nigh hopeless. There was little choice between upstream and downstream until I chanced to recall that the Grandeman acres themselves stretched upstream. Shrugging, keep-alert for the slightest sound of any other man who might lead me to my goal, I therefore started through the woods above the ravine, peering over to search every yard for a sign of the cave.

That did not work. Between big trees and underbrush, the sides of the ravine might have harbored a cave mouth every hundred feet, for all I could tell from above. There was nothing for it save climb down and make my arduous course along the bank, wading where the thickets could not be penetrated.

It seemed dark down here. One glance at my wrist watch and I had a sinking feeling of hopelessness. Four in the afternoon! While I had been caring for old Lavoisier, the day had melted away. If I could not find where Marjorie and Mrs. Colman were held prisoners, and do it inside the next hour or so, night would be upon me!

The first discovery I made was down in the bed of the river, perhaps half a mile above my starting point. It was plain sign of extensive human activity, though for the first moments I could not imagine what sort. Mining of any kind, you see, placer or hardrock, is unknown in this section of the State; and I never had come upon this sort of layout elsewhere.

It consisted of what I thought a purposeless flume, but which really was a wooden sluice with many baffles, not unlike the affairs used in Alaska in the old days of the Klondike rush. There were long handled shovels lying about, rusted, but nothing else. I finally got the idea and looked dubiously at the river. I doubted very much that it contained gold, though that might explain a number of things.

HAD Lavoisier been engaged in mining—or alchemy of some curious nature? The barrel of red clay there in his laboratory might have had some connection, though I did not believe it had come from the river. Lord knows there is no dearth of red clay anywhere in this part of Alabama!

I make no excuses. I must have been so interested in looking for a cave in connection with this sluice exhibit, that I failed to pay attention to the bank behind me.

"*Hi!*" came a raucous shout, and then heavy bodies struck me from the rear, bearing me down and pinioning me as I fought with all strength to win free long enough to use one of my weapons.

No use! Soaked with mud and water, half drowned, stunned by the kick of a heavy boot against the back of the head, I was disarmed and bound —by four darkies!

Yes, these were the same ones La-

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voisier had told me were dead; and now they served another master, a more or less white man with cold blue eyes and a heavy jaw which he had a trick of pushing forward till his teeth showed like those of a bulldog!

I guessed this must be Breen, though I did not intend to let him know I had heard anything from anyone.

"Just what in hell does this mean?" I raged, as soon as I could speak. I was being dragged uphill by two of the blacks, who did not even bother to lift my shoulders, but hauled me by my bound legs. My head bounced until I managed to stiffen my neck.

"Wait and find out—Lamont!" said the blue-eyed man. I saw now he was attired in city clothes; a suit of reddish-brown heather mixture, white shirt, blue tie, brown Homburg hat, and only the knee-length laced boots being a concession to the snakes other than human he might meet in the woods. He had no weapon in sight, but a bulge at his left lapel told me that he had a gun in a sling.

Somehow I hated Breen at sight, feeling even more ready and molten hate than I had for one who would capture two women, probably maltreat them, murder Lavoisier, and now doubtless murder me as one bent on interfering with criminal plans. He was cold, ugly and more than a little masterful without having to descend to being a common bully. I hated him by instinct, and should have done even had I only met him a number of times in polite society. He looked to me like a man of education who was going wrong just because it pleased him to do so. Certainly he was no gangster type, as I had got fairly familiar with it in the north.

The four Negroes spoke no word after that single shouted "Hi!" which had been the signal for them to set upon me.

Only a few yards up the bank the blacks halted a moment; and then I found out how small a chance I ever would have had to find the cave mouth. Two Negroes leaned forward, facing uphill, and looking as though they intended to pull up some tangled dewberry bushes by the roots.

Instead of that, there ensued a clanking, scraping sound, and a slanted wooden trapdoor, sodded and camouflaged with live bushes, came up easily enough to horizontal. This made an open doorway into the hill behind. The doorway was only about five feet six inches high, but six or seven feet wide; and inside the room beyond, a light burned and two white men—one of them Bertram Jackley—came to make sure who it was that entered.

The door was counterweighted; and when it was set at horizontal a pole like the center pole of a tent was set under to hold it in that position.

I was picked up now, carried inside, and tossed on to the bare clay floor at one side.

"No sign of the old man," said the man I took to be Breen, in a quiet voice. "Lost the blood trail. Tomorrow Tiff can bring his dog, just to make sure. We'll find him dead in some branch."

Tiff, I took it as he turned and looked about, nodding mutely, was one of the four Negroes.

ALL this time I had been staring about, taking in the strange surroundings, but vastly more interested in finding out if Marjorie and Mrs. Colman were here. At first there was no indication that they were.

Some torrential rain and washout probably had dug a deep gully down

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this hillside in past time. Old Oyster-Eye, or whoever it was that finished the place, shored the soft walls and ceiling with tree trunks, no doubt filling in earth and shrubs on the roof just as had been done with the concealed door.

The place did not look too reassuring, with some of the shoring down and places showing where rain had brought in cascades of red mud. Though once it no doubt had been safe enough, lack of care made it now into a trap where a wise man would not think of sleeping in a rainstorm. Probably that was why Lavoisier had abandoned it to go to the Grandeman place.

The four Negroes squatted down near me. They seemed to have no domestic duties here; and in the first chamber where I lay there were no signs of eating or cooking, or even of sleeping.

There was a narrow passage, half blocked by a fallen timber and cave-in of mud, leading back into the hill. Beyond that evidently was a second room, possibly more, since the man I took to be Breen went back through the passage, out of sight for a minute.

Little Jackley lighted a cigarette with a nervous, apologetic air. He avoided looking squarely at me. It was plain that without the presence of his boss he was timid—even when there was nothing in the world save a bound, unarmed man to frighten him. I longed for a chance even to talk to him alone, but I was never to get it.

The third man, who was attired in a sleeveless jersey, was dirty and needed a shave. He had a belt and gun in holster about his paunchy middle; but I saw from the gnarled muscles of his arms and the broken, black-rimmed nails on his wide hands, he would use his strength in a knockdown battle more naturally than he would turn to firearms. I put him down as a Gulf Coast dock-walloper used to bossing Negroes.

"I'd like to have someone tell me what this means!" I rasped harshly, glaring at the little man in the cap.

At the first sound of my voice I heard a gasp from the adjoining room, and my heart sank. The women were captives there. Though I had never really doubted it, I had hoped that by some miracle they might have effected an escape at the same time as Lavoisier.

Jackley shrugged. "Don't ask me," he said with what was almost a giggle. "The old man cheated my boss, and now Mr. Breen feels that he—"

"Silence, out there!" thundered the menacing voice of Breen from the inner chamber. He reappeared at the passage, frowning. "I'll do the talking, Jackley. You, Corkhill, bring Tiff and another Negro. This damn roof looks as though it might cave in any minute. See . . . that timber there has got loose, and the whole side . . ."

HERE cries from Marjorie Grandeman, and screams of hysterical terror in another feminine voice, drowned out the rest he said. There were sounds as of clods falling, and I waited, tense, guessing that the three men were having a hard time making any kind of a repair in the shoring.

Catastrophe! Whatever it was they tried, failed. With a rending noise of spikes being drawn from wood, came the heavy, awesome thunder of tons of earth slipping. There was a shriek of pain and an "Oh Lawdy! Oh—ugh!" from one of the blacks, choking cries from the women who doubtless lay there helpless to save themselves, and a steady rumble of cursing as Breen strained savagely to stop the minor avalanche.

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In vain. Of a sudden his voice shouted imperative commands. Jackley stood up, made for the doorway, and stood there just outside, trembling and chattering his fear. The two remaining blacks were divided in courage. One of them, the whites of his eyes showing, uttered a wild yell, pointing upward where a part of the saplings of the ceiling in this chamber were bulging, and made a wild dive, gaining the doorway and pushing past Jackley.

He kicked over the electric bullseye lantern as he went, but fortunately for every one inside the caves, it was not extinguished.

I had not been tied up especially tight or cruelly, considering the nature of these men; but the work had been done by a Negro used to fishing for catfish, and it was an efficient job. Two loops of line strong enough to land a 60-pound cat held my ankles. My wrists lay one along the other in back, with a loop of the heavy green fishline for each wrist. Only a single strand held the loops together, but it might as well have been a ship's hawser tied with a Gordian knot.

Now I writhed up to my knees, fighting to break the line at my wrists—and only slicing it into the skin and flesh almost to the point where I would sever an important artery. I did get up to my knees, and was inching toward the passage and the doomed chamber beyond, when the second darky, deciding finally to go to the rescue of Breen and the other, pushed me over sidewise again and ran into the passage.

He collided with someone, which proved to be the dock-walloper called Corkhill. Blood streaming from his forehead, mingling with the red clay smeared all over him, he looked bestial and horrible. He gasped for air, but came gamely ahead, pushing the black out of his path, and dragging a limp figure in a black dress.

I got one glimpse of the woman's face. Her eyes were closed, and she either had been knocked senseless or fainted. But there was not even a smear of dirt on her countenance; and I saw with despair in my heart that she was not the girl I had sought. She must be the elderly widow, Mrs. Colman.

Down came a sapling trunk from the ceiling, hitting me across the back of the head and stretching me flat again. Not unconscious, quite. I struggled up, in time to get a suffocating shower of sand and clay in the face.

That second a Negro, an unrecognizable white man, and what looked as though it might be a girl, though with features unrecognizable, stumbled into me, went down, and scrambled up again.

Breen was cursing, slowly, gaspingly now. He snarled.

"You can *stay*, Lamont!" he said, and kicked me in the forehead. The last thing I knew was that. My attempted rescue had failed.

CHAPTER VI.

JUST NUTS.

HERE comes a break in my chronicle. I must have been unconscious a good two hours, or else I lapsed from the knockout into a brief sleep, for matters had changed a great deal by the time I awakened.

Briefly, what happened is this. Breen's attempt to make the caves a trifle safer for the time being had somehow loosened a key log. In a series of collapses the inner room of the two caves became almost filled with

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débris from above. And under that débris lay the bodies of two of the Negro guards. No attempt was made to dig them out, as far as I ever learned.

Even the second, outer chamber looked as though it would go. Breen, Jackley, Corkhill, two of the Negroes (one who apparently fled and was not seen again by any of us) and both the women were saved. In a sort of fury, though he had wanted me as a possible help to his grim purpose, Breen had left me there to be buried alive.

By this time the man, who had been a sort of city partner of Lavoisier, began to realize that he had been balked; but with the pertinacity of a scientific man he refused to admit the fact until he had tested all of the remaining and remote possibilities.

I was a remote possibility—simply because he knew I was a grandson of the fellow once called Old Oyster-Eye, and had come into the piney-woods to live near him! Breen knew that Lavoisier had seemed to hate me, but he would not grant that had been the truth until he tested it thoroughly.

Though even now I little suspected, Breen knew that he was playing a grim game of murder—in a county where there was almost no chance for vengeance of the law overtaking him, it was true—for a stake even greater men have admitted to be their price.

Breen had been paid a thousand dollars every now and then by this queer woods recluse, for doing puzzling things. Now the city man felt he had been what he termed a stooge; that he had been cheated out of wealth. Even though at the time he had thought he was getting magnificent pay for some queer services.

The reason I was not dead was simply that the dock-walloper, Corkhill, had not been told I was to die. His simple mind had supposed me valuable, when just a short while before Breen and he and four Negroes had thought it worth while to stalk and capture me, binding me for future reference.

So Corkhill went back into the caves and hauled me out into the dusk. Breen had been given time to wipe his brow and consider. So he let me live for the time being; though, naturally, my fate had been decided long before. All of us had to die, lest we tell this story of woods horror. But first off, we must be persuaded to tell all we knew, or imagined, concerning Jules Lavoisier.

The first thing I really knew was that somewhere a girl was crying—not making much noise about it, but sobbing quietly and helplessly. In a moment more I heard a husky contralto mutter. This was Mrs. Colman, who was Catholic, saying prayers as she fingered a rosary at her breast. She had long since given up hope of deliverance.

Then there was a sound as a man spit through his teeth. This was the heavy-set fellow, Corkhill, left as guard over all of us. Where Breen and Jackley had gone, was a problem. When I did get around to wondering about that, I figured they might be raiding my own cabin for a ham and other food I had there. Mealtimes had been disregarded completely by my captors as well as by myself, of late.

As a matter of fact they had arranged for another base of supplies, a Negro cabin of which I did not know, about three miles distant. Breen had been shrewd enough to park the car in which they came from Mobile, on a wood road far enough away so no sounds of a motor ever reached any of us near Grandeman's. Lavoisier himself had not owned a motor; on the few

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trips the two women had made out of the woods, they had arranged for a hired machine to take them to the railroad.

Now as I and the two women were hauled back to the Grandeman house, there to be dumped, still trussed and helpless, in the upstairs room where the pecans were stored in boxes and on the floor, Breen and Jackley left us for a time, taking with them the one remaining Negro. Corkhill, who did not care whether he was dirty or clean, stayed on guard—promised food and a bottle of liquor as soon as the others could return.

BREEN did have the slight grace to strip the mattresses from the two single beds downstairs, for Marjorie and Mrs. Colman to lie on; but I was dumped on top of the shifting pile of pecans. No doubt the reason why we were put in this upstairs chamber was the same one which had made Breen prefer the caves in the first place. No outsider could believe easily how isolated Old Oyster-Eye had made himself and those few with him. It was logical enough to suppose that some few people did come to see him; and for Breen's dark purpose it was better to avoid all of these.

Nightfall, and the disaster at the caves, had made even Corkhill want a roof over his head, one that would not collapse without warning.

As I learned in the ring, coming back to consciousness after a knockout, getting hold on yourself again without nausea and needless misery, is largely a matter of deep breathing held under even control. It was pretty hard to do, this time. I was nearly done with lack of sleep and food, and with the exertion and hard knocks of the day. They tell me I groaned several times, before coming enough awake to stop any such racket. At any rate I reached the surface of dark waters to find the pipe-smoking and hideously dirty dock-walloper shaking me and telling me to shut up.

Sometime after that I saw Mrs. Colman and Marjorie, the old woman lying there in a coma or slumber, and the girl looking across the floor at me, her eyes big with horror and despair.

Managing a grimace meant to be a smile of encouragement, I took stock of the situation. Both women had their arms tied in front, which saved them some of the pain. Both had their ankles held together by green fishline, exactly as did I.

"Are—are you all right?" came a whisper from Marjorie.

I nodded, setting my teeth, and glanced at the open doorway. Corkhill, the guard, was tilted back in a chair against the wall. Nothing of him was visible except the end of his right knee, and slow puffs of blue smoke which moved across the doorway, bound down the corridor. Two lanterns were burning.

When I moved at all, the foot or so of nuts under me made a rattling or crunching sound. Marjorie was not handicapped thus. It was a desperate chance she took then, one with practically no chance of success; but she tried it. Inching from the mattress to the floor, she started toward me. Little by little she approached, with no sound except I could hear her breathing somewhat quickened. Corkhill went on smoking imperturbably, faced away from the doorway at his back and right.

I started to turn to one side, but the confounded pecans made such an appalling noise that I froze where I was, staring at Corkhill's knee, certain that

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he must turn around and investigate. The puffs continued. With a revolver or pistol at his hand, and certain that all three of us were bound and unarmed, he no doubt felt his spell of guard duty was a mere matter of form.

Marjorie frowned and shook her head, to tell me that I was not to turn. She inched sidewise, turning. Now I saw what she meant to try. The line at my ankles! If she just could manage the knots, it was barely possible that I might be able to get to my feet, tip over the guard as he sat there with a well-directed kick, and make a dash for it —trying to get somewhere out of reach of these men until I could saw off the line at my wrists and get a gun!

At this time I did not know anything at all about the whereabouts of Breen, Jackley and the Negroes—though I had grim doubts that all of them got out of the cave alive. There were no sounds in the house, except an occasional cooking noise from the bowl of Corkhill's briar, however; and now the brave girl was down there, tugging fiercely at that fishline with her teeth!

ONE long minute passed. Marjorie looked back at me. Her blue eyes were tearful now, despairing. But she returned to the hopeless task. I was to learn that the knots were at the back, where she could not reach them unless I turned—something which could not be done now. She had been trying to chew through that tough green braided linen line with her teeth!

Just what a task that would have been even under ideal circumstances, I was to discover shortly. But this moment, to my utter horror, the heavy-set guard, Corkhill, knocked the dottle from his pipe, stretched his arms wide, yawned, got to his feet—and looked into the chamber!

For an instant or two he blinked and frowned, skeptical that he really saw this rather haughty young woman face down there on the floor, apparently kissing my boots. But Corkhill recovered even before Marjorie knew she had been seen.

"*Hi!* What the hell's goin' on?" he bellowed; and I recognized the voice which had given the Negroes the signal to overpower me there on the bank of Dog River.

Marjorie shrank away as he came striding in, crunching pecans to powder underfoot. Picking her up by ankles and arms, as easily as he might handle a sack of corn, he tossed her back to the bare mattress where she had been.

Then he saw the dark green wet place on the fishline, and grunted. He stared at me, and through the mask of red-clay and blood smear on his face I saw the cold brutality of the man. Courageous, yes. Lacking, however, in any great sensitivity to pain himself, he gave little or no consideration to others at any time. A hulking, low grade brute; that named him off, and in the second he laid hands on Marjorie I wanted to knock his ugly face through the back of his head.

I jerked my legs, but the fishline held. It continued to hold, biting in deeper, when he reached down and tested it with a strong pull. Then he turned me over, and made sure the wrist bond was in place also. It was, so I was turned back to lie again on my numbed arms.

The flash of a genuine inspiration came at that second, though. The pecans! These were Schleys, with thin, brittle shells. Anyone can take two of the dried nuts in his hand, close his fist, and break them.

But while the shells were thin and

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brittle, of no value to my purpose, there is something else about pecans I remembered.

The partitions on the inside are stiff, and as sharp almost as safety razor blades. Right now I might be able to use a few of those partitions!

Instantly I cracked two of the nuts, glaring up at Corkhill as though I meant him to think I was grating and gnashing my teeth. But he paid no attention now. He had gone over to take a look at the women's bonds, and while testing them, he stared down in a sort of apelike curiosity at this girl who would take such a foolish chance, trying to outwit him.

Likely enough in that moment, hunkering down on his great haunches like an orang of the jungle, he really saw Marjorie for the first time as an individual. And even stained with red clay, disheveled as she was, she could not look otherwise than attractive to a man. Particularly, shrinking away from his touch in real terror. Corkhill's dim mind probably enjoyed having his women fear him; and I have no doubt he gave them cause.

ONE of the nuts I cracked seemed to have nothing inside it but gritty powder. The other, however, had a sharp partition. I managed to grip it in swollen fingers, starting in to saw with it on the linen line. About eight strokes and it broke, necessitating the cracking of another nut.

Corkhill, the guard, paid no attention to the sounds. He grunted—or possibly chuckled—and reached out, turning Marjorie's face toward himself.

"You let that girl alone! Release us, you brute!"

Shrill and cracked with the strain, the voice of poor old Mrs. Colman, whom I for one had forgotten, came at that instant. I cursed between set jaws, sawing away for dear life. Fortunately I could not see all that the guard actually did; but he certainly did not obey the white-haired widow. She kept on denouncing and pleading, exhibiting a truly remarkable courage in defense of her helpless charge. But it did no more than amuse the ape-man, Corkhill, who went on patting and pinching Marjorie.

I sawed savagely, and my fingertips were greasy now with my own blood. But this was the last chance. I knew it.

Of all interruptions in the world, I think the strangest one occurred then to grant Marjorie a merciful respite of a minute or two from the beast's pawing. Through the open door came a hopping, gray-brown creature—a sleek fox-squirrel, nearly as big as a tomcat, and with a glorious, iridescent brush curving forward over its back, then upward.

The fox-squirrel came over my legs with no sign of fear, dipped into the pile of pecans, seemed to reject the first three or four he found, then chose one which he promptly thrust out of sight in his cheek pouch.

He did that until his cheeks bulged; and I saw, through the blood haze of fury in my eyes, that he was the most persnicketty squirrel in the world, probably. For each of the pecans he chose, he threw aside as inferior at least three or four—sometimes eight! But he got a load to put deep in his autumn nest, at last, and started away.

I think then he smelled or saw Marjorie. At any rate he turned with two rapid flicks of his tail, and hopped over to her. Right up on the hip of her khaki trousers he went, then turned to fasten black beads of eyes in interest upon Corkhill.

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The ape-man guard was startled. He leaned back, lost his balance, and had to put one hand to the floor behind him. Then he was on his feet, gun out.

"I like fried squirrel! Chase him off'n you, lady!" he bade with a gloating chuckle. He flourished the pistol.

"Oh, *don't!*" Marjorie cried in protest. "Nutmeg is my pet—m-my only—" and her voice quivered.

I closed my eyes, sawing away blindly in back, praying that I could get the use of my hands soon, to smash this beast.

Whoooummm! Nutmeg had hopped away; and then he hopped straight out into the hall, headless, and fortunately disappeared from sight of the girl who burst into sobs. It was a grim enough reminder that this ape-man was a real shot with his pistol; but at that moment I doubt that one slug of lead anywhere would have halted me. The little green linen cord did, however. I had to saw some more!

Corkhill collected his still quivering prey, holding it up for the women to see, then tossing it down on the floor. He strolled back to Marjorie, looking down as the tears forced themselves somehow out of her tight closed eyes.

"It don't pay to run away f'um me!" he chortled. "I tellya, it really don't!"

THAT second the frayed cord between my wrists, snapped. My hands and arms were free! I knew the hands were numb and swollen, though the stiffness and strain of the arm muscles probably would not handicap me long. But while Corkhill stood there, slowly replacing the pistol in holster, I had to hold myself taut, to keep from showing my relief—and the plan even then forming in my mind. The plan had to do with surmounting the difficulty of tied ankles; it was certain I should not have a chance to untie them now.

"Could I have a cigarette?" I asked, striving to make my voice that of a smoker long denied his usual solace.

"I ain't got none," answered Corkhill indifferently. His interest now was definitely fixed upon Marjorie, and there was a sensual twist new to his mouth. It was only too plain that his slow mind at last had figured out that it would be all right to play with her a little while Breen was away, and that the prospect of such enjoyment pleased him.

"There are cigarettes right here in my pocket. And matches!" I pleaded desperately. "Can't you see I'm dying for a smoke?"

"All right, buddy, go ahead an' die. Don't mind me!" he jeered. "This li'l lady looks sorta lonesome . . ." Thump. He let down his weight on the edge of the mattress, sprawling out his heavy legs sidewise as he reached over to put one arm under the shrinking figure of Marjorie.

Mrs. Colman's voice was berating him again, but wearily, as though she knew there was no chance of her plea being heeded. As indeed there was not. Sheer horror held me a long second. I could not edge off these pecans without making enough noise to arouse all the squirrels in Washington County.

But I *could* grab that leg, and at least come to grips with Corkhill!

At the second I saw that slimmest of possible chances, I grabbed it and yanked the leg toward me with all the strength left in my strained arms.

Instantly I knew that I had the grimmest fight of my life on my hands. It would be to the death, and with a man, still armed, who was stronger—if somewhat muscle-bound—and certainly more at home than myself in a rough

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and tumble fracas of the waterfront type. I simply meant to get Corkhill if I could; and if I were going to fail and have to take a hot shot from that pistol, I'd delay the final moment just as long as I could. Perhaps Breen would come . . . and though his face showed him a killer, as brutal in his own way as Corkhill, I felt pretty sure a feeling of caste in him would prevent him allowing a girl of good family to be maltreated by such a one as my opponent. At least, in this particular fashion.

OF my fight with Corkhill I remember almost nothing, save what has been brought back to me. That gives away the secret that I *did* survive; but how could I have told any of this peculiar yarn otherwise? I did survive, but for what must have been six or seven minutes of brute struggle, I did not think I would.

I got one leg, then both of them at the thighs, as he was startled, thrown off balance. I slogged an overhand right, aiming for his face—but hitting the hair on top of his head with no damage.

Blind kicking on his part, with a striking down of one hand—and at the same instant a forceful gesture with his right hand downward, toward the pistol holster.

I reached it almost as quickly; and that was one thing I do recall vividly. He almost got that gun free; and if he had done so it would have been quick curtains. But I grabbed the wrist, forced it upward. And then little by little I shifted grip until I got one finger with his on the trigger. Holding the arm and weapon high, I pumped out each crashing cartridge, six more of them!

Then with a savage curse, Corkhill let the empty weapon drop, to devote himself to the job of choking the life out of me.

Corkhill was something of a freak. He had more muscles than any two men could use to best advantage; but every now and then he worked his bunchy body into exactly the right leverage position, from which he could put out a sort of Herculean thrust which would have thrown both Mr. Gotch and Mr. Hackenschmidt clean over the right field wall of the White Sox Ball Park—but even now that flop of a wrestling match is forgotten. My match with Corkhill is not forgotten by me! Or by others, though the audience was small.

I almost had a half-nelson, or what I thought would be one, when something like an earthquake struck me in the middle. He had managed to work up one foot against my chest. A sudden shove—and I was hurtled across the room, away from the two captive women, to strike the wall—and fall down upon the pecans, almost where I had been.

With a sort of snarling cry deep in his throat, like an old man ape fighting for life in the jungle, he took three short steps. Long arms outstretched and clutching for me, he dove at me where I fell—and I had no more than a brief split-second's glance of him leaving the ground and diving through the air!

I don't know just what happened then. I think he must have overshot my body, driven into the wall with his head, and come down partly dazed. At any rate, eons afterward I found myself with fingers sunk deep into his great throat, the heavy body inert under my knees, and a girl's voice screaming to me to stop, telling me that I would kill him!

Kill him? Yes, even when I fully

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understood that I must have killed Corkhill, I found it difficult to release my cramped fingers and tear them away from his throat. The loops of green fishline were still about the wrists, you see, and my fingers were swollen to twice or thrice their normal size. I untied my ankles.

BUT I staggered up, knee-deep in the pecans, and went like a drunken man over to the two women. In a second I turned, realizing what I must do, and went back to Corkhill's body. There I took the big jackknife I found in one pocket, and hastened to slash away all the bonds from Mrs. Colman and Marjorie.

The girl gave a gasping sigh of relief, and stood up, trying to stretch her muscles and make them work.

"The gun! Mr. Lamont, get his gun!" she whispered, pointing down at the floor. Then she turned to Mrs. Colman, who did not realize as yet that she had been freed.

I dove for the weapon, which lay there partially covered by pecans, I got it, and remembered instantly that it was empty. Waiting only to free my own wrists from the two green loops which had bitten down through the skin and were making the raw flesh smart, I went back to Corkhill's body, rather dazedly reassured myself that he was dead (I still was moving in a blood-red daze, beginning to reason a little, but not all at once), and searched hastily for more cartridge clips for the pistol. There were none at all!

I had a gun now, but not a single cartridge to fire in it! And here were two helpless women, one of whom I probably would have to carry from the house, with at least three of their enemies and mine either in this house or near it somewhere!

"Quick!" I said in a hoarse, choked whisper. "There isn't anything to use in this gun. We'll just have to try to get out of here and away, somehow. Get one of those two lanterns!"

"Oh!" breathed Marjorie, her blue eyes wide. "But that—that other man? Mr. Breen?"

I shrugged. "I'll take Mrs. Colman, if you'll just tell her to keep quiet." With that I lifted the old lady; and as she was unconscious again, I slung her over my left shoulder to make for ease in carrying.

With Marjorie tip-toeing at my other side, reaching up to help steady my burden, we went almost noiselessly to the head of the stairs.

There we stopped, frozen by dread and a certainty that we had come just too late! Below us sounded the heavy tread of at least two, probably three men; and there came the glow of a flashlight in the darkness below, which paled the pair of lanterns upstairs into insignificance.

"You, Corky!" came an imperative shout—a suspicious, wondering voice I knew must be that of Breen. "We heard the shooting. What the hell's happened to *you?*

"Hey! Is everything all right? Why don't you answer?" This after a pause of seconds, during which time my wits slowly began to function.

"Yes, everything's just about perfect," I replied, knowing any attempt at concealment was useless. "Corkhill is dead. The two women are well on their way to get help, and I am just honing to have the rest of you come upstairs and taste the lead out of Corkhill's pistol!"

There was a muffled oath, a stifled scream of alarm from Jackley, and then footsteps scattering away from the bottom of the stairs. At the very

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least I had given them something to think over mighty carefully!

CHAPTER VII.

A SIEGE AND A SORTIE.

BECAUSE of the peculiar construction of the old Grandeman house, which I have mentioned, old Mrs. Colman, Marjorie and I had the two rooms of the second floor, a bit of corridor, and as much of a narrow stairway as we could see from good cover, to ourselves. There was no door through to the other side of the upstairs; and there was no roof of single-storey addition conveniently under one of the windows, as was the case on the other side.

I signed for the two women to keep absolutely quiet. It was a desperate hope indeed; but it did seem there might be a chance that Breen would believe my tale about the flight of the two women, and that I had been fool enough to lie in wait behind them, looking for revenge.

Probably he did weigh the tale and find it improbable. But after a mutter of low voices downstairs came silence. Then a few creaks of the dry flooring. Breen, certain that I, at least, was in his power as long as he guarded the staircase, had taken position down there. It was typical of this grim man that he did not try to parley. He set himself to wait for daylight.

It was old Mrs. Colman who punctured my tale for keeps. No doubt all this terror and physical violence had dazed her; but at any rate she was paying no attention to Marjorie and myself; but lying back on the mattress. Now and then she would turn to stare at the dead man across the room, then look up again at the ceiling. Then all of a sudden, picking a moment of unnatural silence in the whole house, she began to mutter one of her prayers!

There came a snort of triumph from below, and my blood congealed. Breen had recognized a woman's voice, of course, and knew now that he had nothing in the world to fear save what I might be able to do when I finally was forced to make a dash down those narrow stairs.

"You might as well come now and have it over, Lamont!" he rasped. "I know you're all up there. No food—"

"Pecans!" I retorted.

"No water," he continued, and this was the terrible truth. Until that moment I had not noted the fact, but my mouth and throat were parched. By the sudden drawn look which came to Marjorie's lovely face—which somehow she had managed to clean of the red clay stains—I knew both women were probably in worse case than I. Certainly no heed had been paid their wants while in those caves.

"And so I'll wait. Jackley and I have water, liquor and food inside us, and more right here at hand. Come and get it!"

That was all. He did not offer to treat, since any bargain offered would be such a palpable lie. After two murders, nothing at all save wiping out all witnesses could make him safe. Washington County would never indict him; but once let a sweet-faced girl like Marjorie get away from the woods to tell her story, and every able-bodied southern male in and near Citronelle would join the vengeful posse. Breen and Jackley would be lucky if they got ropes instead of the stake. . . .

Killing a Cajan and a Negro would not matter; but the indignities suffered by Marjorie and Mrs. Colman would bring lynch law on the trail of the

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criminals. They would not be safe anywhere in the South.

For the sake of clarity I have used names for our enemies all the way through this chronicle; but it was during the next half hour that I really learned about them from Marjorie. As I waited there in the doorway, watching the head of the stairs, the open jackknife and the empty pistol my only weapons, Marjorie sat beside me, a hand lightly on my left shoulder. We talked in whispers too faint to be heard downstairs. Mrs. Colman went on praying. She seemed to have forgotten all about us.

BREEN and another man named Coverbaugh had somehow been associated in a queer, secretive sort of business, with Jules Lavoisier. The two of them had come, quarreled with the old man; and he had had them put off the place.

That had been ten days or so ago. Marjorie felt sure now that they had come back; that they had been responsible for the burst of machine gun bullets sent through the windows—probably just to frighten, and to give an earnest of their intentions.

What had become of Coverbaugh, Marjorie could not guess. But I could. Those four silent blacks had been obeying Jules Lavoisier the previous night. They had captured a skulker and thrown him in the swamp—just as they had threatened to throw me and my car!

"They must have cornered Tiff and the rest of those Negroes," whispered Marjorie with a shiver, leaning a little closer to me, "and given them a choice of sudden death—or of turning against grandfather. He always said he could do anything with them, just as long as they knew he was right there. The minute he gave them something to carry out in his absence, they were just as careless and crazy as children."

I marveled at this girl, the courage of her. Facing what she knew was almost certain death, she could control her voice and tell me all she knew about Jules Lavoisier and his queer, secret business.

"I don't think he ever succeeded in what he meant to do," she said. "It was a chemical process for extracting iron from red clay. He told me once that anyone could do it—get some iron, I mean—but the task was to invent a process cheap enough so it could be used commercially.

"Then there was something else, that had to do with work down at the river. The blacks used to come back wet and very dirty."

"I know," I nodded. "It was some kind of sluice mining, though for what I can't guess. However, Mr. Lavoisier had something worth while, all right, to bring these men and make them ready to murder out of hand. Oh!"

At that second I recalled the queer note given me by Old Oyster-Eye himself. I fished it up from my shirt front where it had lain, and gave it to Marjorie.

"Maybe this means something, but I don't know what!" she said blankly, after leaning away toward the lantern and reading the cryptic message. "My pet squirrel . . . poor Nutmeg!" And tears came then.

For the first time I put an arm around her and clasped her tightly. "Just one thing, Marjorie," I said huskily, aware of a constriction in my throat, and a heart down below it somewhere throwing uppercuts at it. "I don't want you to call Lavoisier your grandfather any more, because, you see—I believe he was *mine!*"

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Briefly I told her the strange tale I had got from the dying man, and the rather lame explanation I had evolved of my rascal father dying in prison.

"Sometime, if we ever get out of here alive," I promised, my brain on fire in spite of the folly of thinking of anything save our present peril, "I'm going to try to explain to you, Marjorie, just why we shouldn't both have the same grandfather!"

She actually smiled, and laid her uptilted face against my shoulder.

"I'll be waiting to hear, Mr. Lamont," she whispered.

"Pierre!"

"Pierre," she amended. "But now, *isn't* there some way we can get out? The window there . . . ? I'm really *very* anxious to hear your story!"

I PUT a finger against her lips, as she had whispered louder. Then I got noiselessly to my feet and walked to the window, easing up the sash an inch at a time before I appeared in front of it. Then I whispered back for Marjorie to shield the lantern light, which she did by leaning down and almost enfolding it with her arms and slender body.

It was as dark now as a coal hole out there, clouds blotting out both moon and stars. I had little hope that such an obvious way of escape would be left unguarded, but I leaned a little outward and took a long look.

There was a guard. I could not see him, but I did see the red coal of a cigarette moving slowly along, brightening, then dulling to red with the smoker's puffs. Jackley, I thought. He smoked cigarettes; and I was quite sure Breen was waiting inside at the bottom of the stairway.

The red coal disappeared. I thought I knew what that meant. Jackley, a nervous sort anyhow, was patrolling up and down below the windows of this room and the next one. A tree or bush intervened, when he got a few yards along his sentry-go.

The red coal reappeared, confirming the guess. Then suddenly it held still, and sparks fell from it. The glow increased until I could make out the thin face and cap of Bertram Jackley. He was lighting one cigarette from the butt of the other.

This accomplished, he resumed his pacing. With the mental flare of an idea which should have come to me long before, save for the helpless Mrs. Colman being there to care for first, my heart paused, then beat furiously. Just outside and below this dormer window, if it was identical with the one I had entered on the other side of the house, was a narrow copper gutter. The pitch of roof was not impossibly steep. Could we not wait until Jackley was out of sight, then one at a time get up on this roof, cross over the other side, lower ourselves to the roof of the kitchen or servants' quarters, whichever it was, then escape by means of that big tree branch I had used in entering this house the first time?

I tiptoed back, and quickly explained the roof and tree layout to Marjorie as well as I could. Also she instantly was ready to take the chance, any chance, but pointed silently at Mrs. Colman. The old lady, looking small, frail and pitiful in the dim light of the lantern, had fallen asleep. No one could imagine her climbing roofs, or swinging up into the branches of a tree.

"I'll carry her somehow, if she'll let me," I said, my lips close to Marjorie's ear. "But you must wake her. And after we once start, she must remember not to make a sound, no matter what happens! If she does—"

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"She won't!" whispered Marjorie, her hair brushing my bent cheek as she turned to waken the old lady.

Mrs. Colman moaned once, but then she was quiet. It seemed to take a dreadful time to make her understand, however. I was holding my breath, listening, afraid now that we seemed to have a chance.

Breen might start some scheme like sending up one of the colored men as a human shield, and fighting it out in gunsmoke.

But down below I heard a reassuring sound, the clink of a bottle on glass, and then the low gurgle of liquid being poured. It showed me how faint sounds carried in that preternaturally still house. I unlaced and removed my boots.

It is strange how inconsequently the mind works in moments of tension. Waiting, gooseflesh creeping up my forearms, I suddenly thought of the pet squirrel lying dead there in the hall. This was the animal mentioned in Lavoisier's strange epistle, no doubt. He had been as tame as could be, if a trifle finicky about his food.

HE had rejected more pecans than he had taken! What was it that Lavoisier's letter said? He could recall it word for word.

Marjorie dear, your heritage is black instead of white, and your pet squirrel rejects it with scorn!

Right down there were a number of the pecans the rodent had rejected! I gathered up a handful, which now seemed oddly heavy, and thrust them into a hip pocket for future investigation, wadding a handkerchief on top of them so they would not rattle. Had Old Oyster-Eye really conjured gold out of the sandy bed of Dog River? Hiding gold in nuts would surely be a novel idea in caches!

But now Marjorie touched my arm. Mrs. Colman was on her feet, and I saw that Marjorie had taken the hint; both she and the white-haired widow were in their stocking feet.

As I had planned, Marjorie went out of the window first, just as soon as Jackley's cigarette disappeared the first time. I heard faint scratching sounds as she cautiously climbed up the pitch of shingles. Then nothing. Jackley was coming back again.

About four long minutes later Mrs. Colman and I followed. I shudder still at the memory of those excruciating seconds, getting the old lady out there on the roof, then getting her in place on my back. I will say that once there she clung with arms around my neck and legs gripping my waist. So tightly did she cling, in fact, that at first I had difficulty climbing. But little by little the first fierce tenseness of her strength slackened, and it was easier for me.

Climbing upward in the blackness, I reached the ridge of this side of the roof and touched Marjorie before I saw her at all.

"I'm lost!" she whispered. "Which way is it we're going? I can't see a thing!"

"Down a short V notch, up the other side, then down a long slant to the gutter on the other side," I whispered. "Go to the left of the dormer window, and wait for me." Getting from that point to the lower roof, and thence to the branch of tree was hard, possibly too hard. I seemed to recall that the branch along which I had crawled, had bent a foot or two under my weight. If so I might not even be able to catch it by jumping upward.

However, we had improved our

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position. If worse became worst, these women could dangle at the end of my belt and drop to the ground the distance of twelve feet or thereabouts, measured from the eaves of the kitchen.

Marjorie was waiting, and all seemed quiet inside the house. I began to feel hot hopes rocketing through my brain. If we just could get into this tree, climb down, and make it the short distance to my cabin, we could get all set, start the Ford, and be far away in the woods before these men knew we had left the upstairs prison!

Alas for such a simple solution of our perils! Everything went with suspicious smoothness right until the moment we stood underneath the dark bough I meant to use. It was no more than six inches above my fingertips. I could jump and get it, without fail; so I put down Mrs. Colman, gauged the distance, flexed my knees, and—

Disaster! Though shingles had been replaced on this roof, all the framework and joists were the original wood, no doubt eaten through by ants and borers. At the first downward thrust of my intended skyward leap, my right foot went straight through with a rending crash which must have sounded inside the house like the smashing impact of a meteor from the skies!

MY whole leg went through to the thigh, and I had a desperate struggle of half a minute to get out and on my feet again. Meanwhile rasping shouts came from within Grandeman's, and from outside came a Negro's answer, and Jackley's quavery cry of apprehension.

There was nothing to it now but try again, and trust in speed. I moved along a little, jumped again, and this time, although the wood cracked under my toes, I did not break through. I caught the limb, brought it down, let the trembling little Mrs. Colman climb on my back while Marjorie swung up by herself.

Then I imitated Tarzan, and swung up rather more awkwardly after her, with Mrs. Colman clinging to me with fingers, teeth and toenails like an aged parrot clinging to a spar in a gale of wind.

Probably it took Breen a little time to find out just what had happened, and to make sure his prisoners had fled from the second floor room. No doubt, certain that Mrs. Colman and Marjorie would not be deserted, he had conjectured nothing more drastic than possibly a leap from the window on my part. Jackley had been there armed to fix me if I tried anything of the sort in extremity. He knew there were no bed sheets to be knotted and twisted; nothing but our own clothes and those of the dead Corkhill; and a rope made of such odds and ends would be more perilous than a straight charge down the stairs, exchanging hot lead with him. Of course he had no idea of Corkhill's improvidence in having only one clip of cartridges for his pistol, else there would have been no siege at all. By this time we all would have been tortured, probably dead.

I never guessed one of those umbrella-ribs of live-oak could be so interminably long! By the time all three of us reached the huge, gnarled bole, two flashlights were darting here and there on the ground level, and Breen, in a towering rage, was gritting out what he meant to do to Jackley for letting us escape through the window he was supposed to be watching. The little man was whimpering and positively squalling at times with fear. The Negro appeared once in a flashlight

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beam. He was carrying a cudgel of some sort, crooked at the end like a gigantic hockey stick, but he had no light.

We could not descend, but for just a moment I had some hope. Breen seemed to think we had taken refuge on the roof, and was shouting up threats to me, saying he would burn the whole place right away, if we didn't surrender.

While this was going on I whispered to Marjorie to take the next higher limb, which stretched in the direction away from the house. If she would crawl out to the end she might see a chance to drop and run. I would stay, perforce, with Mrs. Colman; but if Marjorie possibly could get to my Ford, she might be able to bring help in two or three hours. I hoped, by climbing higher and propping the half fainting old lady in a crotch of branches, to stay undiscovered until daylight. After that it would be just too bad.

Marjorie squeezed my hand and started to obey. I stealthily wriggled up about six feet more, where a crotch offered some security if no comfort, and which was practically out of sight from the ground. Then I cautiously descended, hoping against hope that a break would give me a chance to get Breen myself, after Marjorie cleared.

It was that scoundrelly woods-negro traitor who betrayed us, just as he had betrayed his employer. His trained eyes, used to strange duties in the night, discerned that far bough swaying a trifle as Marjorie swarmed along it!

"Hyah, Boss!" he yelled the alarm. "Da dey is! Da!" He gestured excitedly upward.

Jackley backed away, but his flashlight showed me Breen coming right under the tree, playing his own light on the branches. I had to do something to distract his attention, though I was sure my number was up. Taking out the jackknife which had belonged to Corkhill, yanking open all three blades, I leaned and flung it full at that bulldog face behind the upraised gun and flash.

As a yell of pain and rage came from him, I swung out and dropped, aiming squarely for his head and the spurt of orange fire which angled up to meet me.

CHAPTER VIII.

SECRET OF THE SORCERER.

THE bullet nipped the calf of my leg, though I did not know it till afterward. With the impetus of a ten-foot drop I crashed down squarely upon Breen's right shoulder, just as he ducked his head and strove to dodge away.

It was a crunching, terrible impact, which sent me rolling away—but with certain knowledge that I had not been badly hurt, while Breen must have suffered broken bones. I staggered up, dodged a half-seen blow of the Negro's cudgel, then threw myself upon the squirming bulk of Breen. I saw and wrested away the pistol before he could train it on me; but I did not shoot him with it. He had gone limp, and except for the shuddering curses in a half-whisper which came from his mouth, he might have been dead.

The flashlight, still streaming its white beam along the ground, was a yard from my side. I reached for it, wondering dazedly what had happened to Jackley.

That second came near costing me my life. The Negro, shouting some-

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thing to his boss, came at me while I was still on one knee. I looked up, everything tipping dizzily before my eyes, and saw a gigantic shadow out of the night, limned faintly by the flashlight. The Negro had swung back his cudgel far behind his shoulder. And now, before I could raise the pistol and fire, the blow would fall . . .

It never fell. Out of the night came a slender, sprinting shadow, Marjorie Grandeman. With a choked cry and a leap like that of a sprinter breasting the tape she flung herself, not against the body of the black man, but against the back-swung cudgel!

She clung to it, too, bearing him around in a half-turn and making him stagger for balance. And that precious second or two told the story. I saw, and staggered up. One blow with the pistol barrel and he sank down, unconscious.

I looked hard for Jackley then, but he had departed. No matter who won, he had been sure of dire punishment, so he had snatched the first chance to flee.

For a little while I had Marjorie take the pistol and watch for him, with orders to shoot him on sight. I bound the Negro, and dashed back into the house for some of that green fishline, and then took one look at Breen. He was unconscious, breathing faintly. I found out later his back was broken. He died while I was up in the tree, carrying down poor old Mrs. Colman.

Even then we were uneasy, since it was just possible that other conspirator, Coverbaugh, had not been the man I had seen the four blacks carrying away to the swamp, and that Jackley now was bearing him the news of trouble.

So leaving the dead Jonathan Breen lying there beside his moaning and helpless black henchman, I carried Mrs. Colman over to my place, and put her in the back of the Ford, with Marjorie. Then I drove as fast as I could go, to Citronelle, waking a nightshirted hotel proprietor, and no doubt scandalizing him.

Marjorie insisted that I wait for her. She put Mrs. Colman to bed, and then borrowed a shotgun and shells from the gaping hotel man.

"I'm going right back with you, Pierre!" she said firmly. "No use talking. I know you have to do something about that—that black man. And I can keep watch for you!"

IN spite of my protests, so it was. She even refused to let me get hold of someone else to go along; and I did not try to insist on that. This was one story of our lives we would not tell others for a long time to come. The piney-woods drops the mould of its vegetation upon many secrets, grim as well as beautiful.

Back at Grandeman's, while Marjorie sat on a tree stump in the graying dawn, the shotgun across her knees, I went to the stiff and now terrorized Negro I had left bound. When he discovered he was not to be slain out of hand, he was willing enough to perform the gruesome tasks I had for him.

Getting one of the long-handled shovels from the Dog River sluice, I marched him back to my cabin. There he dug a grave and I buried Lavoisier, my grandfather, the feared and misunderstood sorcerer of the woods. I spoke a brief service.

In the soft bank of the river just out of sight of Grandeman's, we buried Corkhill and Breen together; and I am afraid there was no service at all.

"Look here," I said to the still frightened buck Negro then, "do you know what will happen to you, if you're

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still around these woods when I tell about all this, tonight?"

"Y-yassuh! Boss, Ah—"

"Can you run—*fast?*" I cut in. He said he could. And he certainly did, when I finally made him understand he had twelve hours to get out of my sight forever. I should have done more than that to him, probably, but right then I was just too tired and thankful to care about any more vengeance.

Returning to where I had left Marjorie waiting, I had one last shock—which for a few moments seemed the most breath-taking of all. She had disappeared!

I shouted, and got no answer. I dashed back and forth in the woods, and did not find her. I ran into the house, nearly frantic with the fear that Jackley had come back with reinforcements, and recaptured her.

But then she did answer, calling through the closed and locked door of the chamber she and Mrs. Colman had used.

The door resisted my rush. "What's the matter, dear?" I cried. "Let me in!"

"No, you *can't* come in! Not now!" And I thought there was panic in her voice.

"Why?" I prepared to smash the door with my shoulder.

"Well, if you m-must know," she responded, "with all due respect to danger, I j-just thought I'd take a b-bath!"

So, when I recovered from that I grinned rather weakly, went down to the pool of Dog River, and did likewise.

THEN it was I discovered the slight flesh wound in my leg, and bound it. It was nothing. The feeling of a cold water dip, and clean clothes, with the early sun just cutting through the misted trees, repaired all the damage except a certain fatigue. And I was to forget all about that.

Going after the handkerchief in my hip pocket, I found it grimy gray-black! In the bottom of the pocket were some fragments of pecan shell, and perhaps four ounces of a gritty, strangely heavy *black powder!*

I frowned down, hefting the stuff in the palm of my hand. It was as heavy as gold, or heavier; but like no gold in appearance. Walking back to Grandeman's, I racked my brain to remember the little elementary chemistry I had taken . . . in particular, the list of the metallic elements. But for the moment I got nowhere. This was not gold, or radium, or lead; and it seemed too heavy to be silver, which I knew oxidized black enough. And at this particular time silver was so cheap in price no one would have thought of a few ounces or pounds of it as being treasure. A heritage for a beloved ward.

Black and white . . . rejected by the pet squirrel . . . yes, here was the heritage Lavoisier had meant Marjorie to have; and together we would discover its nature somehow!

Her door was still closed. This was my first experience in waiting for the completion of a girl's toilette; and I found it irksome in spite of the puzzle of the pecans.

I went upstairs, and examined some more of the nuts. Looking closely at one—something I suppose no one ever does—with a nut he wants to eat—I could see how it had been sawed straight across, then glued together again. Each nut held close to one ounce of the black powder; and there were literally thousands of the nuts stored in those boxes, and on the floor!

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Some of them, perhaps one-fourth, were real nuts, however, with the meat still in them. Camouflage, no doubt.

Marjorie did not appear for nearly twenty minutes more. I emptied several of the nuts, and took the powder downstairs to Lavoisier's chemical lab. There were some works on industrial chemistry on a shelf. No use to me. Ah! There was an ancient textbook: Wharton's *Inorganic Chemistry Complete.*

I went at it feverishly—and to make a long story short, I found out what I sought! It was superbly simple!

Only—a feeling of awe crept over me, remembering the weight of filled nuts upstairs. Marjorie was a rich woman! Not that I had any of those ancient follies about me, those ideas that a man who loved a woman must not tell her so and marry her, if she had more of this world's goods than he. Heck no. Just the same I was taken aback. This dirty black powder in the pecans was worth, I believed, something like eighty or ninety dollars an ounce. And there were thousands of ounces of it!

I heard Marjorie's door open, and hurried to meet her. Only I stopped right there in the doorway. She was all in white, a filmy, summery frock, and as lovely, sweet and provocative with her wistful half smile straight into my eyes, as . . .

You man, who knows what it means to find the girl you love suddenly far more beautiful than you ever had imagined her, must supply your own comparison!

I could neither speak nor move for seconds. Then:

"Oh, you're lovely!" or some such inane, self-evident thing. Then I caught hold of myself with a gulp. I would tell her much, all the words that now were tumbling over themselves behind my paralyzed tongue. But first she must realize two things.

"Come!" I said, going to her and taking both her hands which were rising toward me. I thought perhaps she frowned as I led her into the laboratory.

But then for a space of minutes I avoided looking into her blue eyes, while I showed her the black powder, and pointed out a page of the textbook.

"It's *platinum!*" I said earnestly. "Your foster-grandfather has left you a huge fortune, surely more than one hundred thousand dollars! It's all up there in the nuts!"

"Really?" she said, and did not sound excited at all. "But platinum isn't that color, is it?"

I explained as well as I could, and part of it probably always would remain guess. Lavoisier had found an unexpected platinum placer in the bed of Dog River, much as in 1735 the Spaniard Ulloa first discovered the metal in the bed of the Rio Pinto, in Colombia.

PROBABLY Lavoisier sent out some shipments, which he had Breen and Coverbaugh sell for him. Then these two found out how small their relative takings were, and demanded more. Lavoisier refused, and did not send out any more of the metal.

He had hoarded it, and probably cleaned up the last of the placer, as there didn't seem to have been any work done there for weeks.

"No, I didn't see the Negroes go there for some time," Marjorie agreed.

"In this laboratory, he changed over the flake platinum into what you see, platinum black—it's an easy zinc process. Then, because he distrusted

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Breen and Coverbaugh, or because he feared a Cajan might not be able to leave Alabama with a treasure of pure platinum, he conceived the idea of hiding the stuff in these nuts. Nobody would object to a Cajan taking a few Schley pecans anywhere, of course.

"So Jules Lavoisier failed in his iron process, but found wealth and power anyhow," I concluded. "He meant you to have this, and you shall. We'll take the boxes down in my Ford, and get part of a vault in the bank. They'll sure think we're nuts, storing pecans in a bank!"

Marjorie shrugged at his feeble joke.

"No one ever could accuse you of being the least bit foolish, Pierre," she said; and it did not sound like a compliment.

"We'll see," I promised, feeling the blood rush up to my cheeks. "You know now you are rich. You know also that my own father, Lamont, probably was one of the world's choicest rascals—though I don't intend to try to find out what he did to prove it!"

"My own father couldn't have been exactly a saint," she retorted, and there was a sparkle almost of anger in her eyes. "But what have our fathers got to do with—anything?"

"Last of all," I said, taking a deep breath, "Cajans don't usually make love to white heiresses. I'm at least half Cajan!"

"Well, is that all?" she demanded with fine scorn. "Knowing you and—and Mr. Lavoisier, makes me want to apologize for not bringing you some Cajan blood, myself! Oh—!

"Pierre, I *hate* you! You've made me propose to you, and you don't love me—"

Her lips were just right, half way through the word *me*. I was too hungry for the glory, the loveliness of her to wait one second longer. It was not for many minutes that I found the breath and words to tell her all I meant. By then it did not matter. She knew.

THE END

A Meal in a Spoon

WHAT you might eat in the frozen north if you had no broiled bear or homemade waffles is shown pretty well by provisions the Graf Zeppelin took on its Arctic flight, some of which have been saved and are supposed to be as good to eat as they ever were. They were packed in white muslin bags—enough in each bag for four men, while it lasted. After that they were supposed to hunt their own. On opening the bag, the four stranded hungries would find one small can each of sugar, butter, potato powder, meal, egg powder, dried milk and pemmican. There would be a paper package of tea powder so small you could crumple it in your hand, a little bag like a salted peanut sack holding pepper and salt, and a cloth-covered cylinder of dried peas about the size of a blackjack.

They would also find several good-sized bars of German chocolate with pink label in a glassine package and a reassuring pasteboard box full of crackers, all carefully wrapped. All the rations, which ought to have provided some tasty if microscopic stews, made a bundle about the size of a small sofa pillow.

—*Delos White.*

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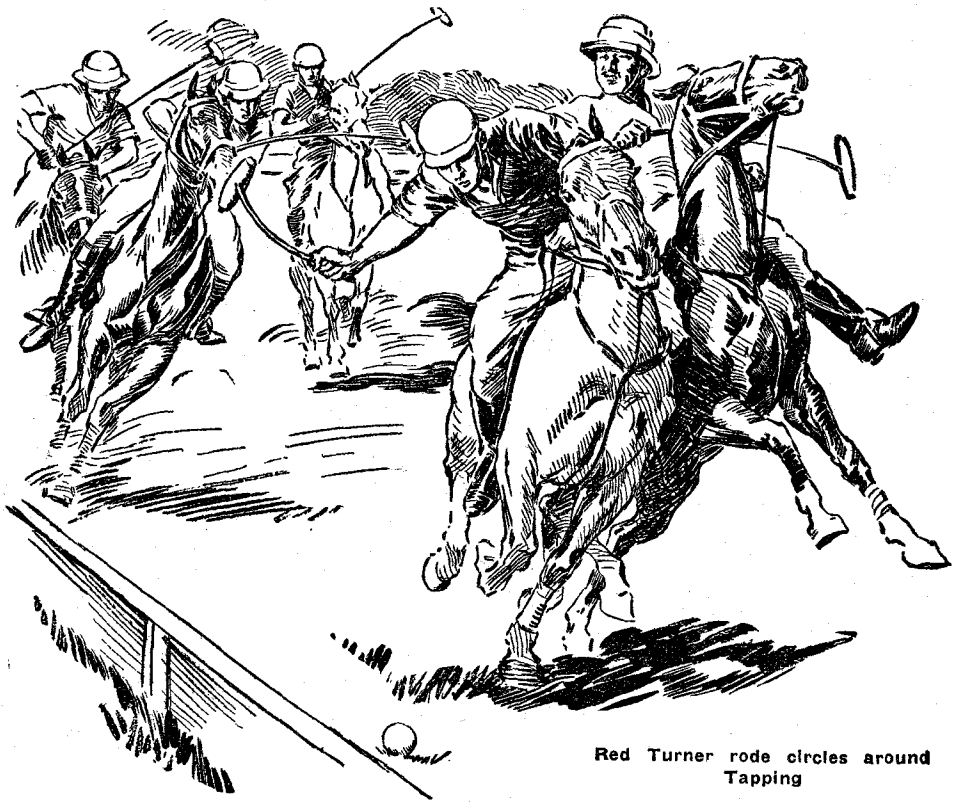
A Western cowboy smashes through in the "millionaires' sport"



Red Turner rode circles around Tapping

No. 3 On the Hard Guys

By HOWARD R. MARSH

HOT! Man, if hell is as hot as the Mojave Desert was that night, then I'll resign from hell.

The steel car was like a frying pan in a quick lunch, only it smelled of horses and alkali dust and ammonia. Even aristocratic polo ponies like those I was chaperoning can smell plenty high when the temperature is a hundred and thirty. To make the torture complete, the train pulled up at a tank town on the Nevada border and the engineer must have went to sleep or died or something.

"You'll go nuts if you lay still any longer," I said to myself. So I pried myself from the mud puddle made by my sweat and slid open the door of that furnace-car. And what was the name of that tank town? Hot diggity-dog, if that burg wasn't honored with the perfect monicker of Torturia!

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Torturia went haywire all of a sudden. Up the single main stem some men yelled. Three shots smacked out, another yell and three more shots, fast—snack-snack-snack! I heard the bullets crackle through wood and then whine across the desert so I ducked automatic inside. When I looked out again the mob scene was starting.

First the swinging door of the Torturia Social Club spit out a long-legged young fellow going hellity-larrup. He hot-footed it past three other saloons and a café before the opposition gang got under way, but when they started pouring out the swinging doors it was like water from a spout. Most of them had guns ready and a couple was so excited they pulled the triggers, which made those ahead yell and jump faster.

"There he goes! Get him!" Those behind yelled real bloodthirsty and fired at nothing. But the nearest ones were dead quiet except for the pound of their feet on the road.

THE long-legged lone wolf whirled and shot once in the air, then rampsed past the last street lamp, which was only a bulb on a wire. Behind him the gang had spread like a fan to head him off and a few of the fast ones were plenty close to him. He lost his ten-gallon sombrero. His lean shadow showed in the purple night and he was heading for our train. He dove under an express car just three cars down the line, a couple of the mob almost grabbing the heels of his cowboots.

In a split second, it seemed, he showed again. And how he showed! Right at my feet, past my feet, into the car. He had spotted the open door, I guess, and decided the car would make a fort or something. I caught him by the shoulder and sent him rolling and panting down the floor.

"Under the hay," I said. "Look out for Black Burt's hoofs," I said. "They're wicked."

Some guy outside stuck a flashlight in my face and found me looking sleepy at the night. "You see him?" he yelled.

"See who?" I said and yawned. "What's all the noise about?"

"Red Turner," he said. "He like to have killed a man uptown."

"Town?" I said.

A couple more flashlights came flicking along and I could see the first guy looking up at me. His face was like a moon except for the sweat and a pair of walrus mustaches. He was puffing heavy and a big star rose and fell on his manly breast.

"What's this burg, sheriff?" I said.

"You didn't see him, eh?" he said and flashed his light in the car. One of the ponies snorted and stamped.

"What you got?" he said suspicious.

"Polo ponies," I said. "Seybourne Weston's polo stable. Best ponies in the world," I said. "Want to climb in and see what real horseflesh is?" I said. "Come on!"

It was good poker, because he turned to his mob. "Red's probably back somewhere. This guy ain't seen him. Start here and search every open car. All the tops and brake beams, too. And look out for his fists!"

So we stuck another hour in Torturia while half the town looked for Red Turner with plenty of flashlights and noise and a couple of false alarms and blind shooting. Three times I invited the posse into the car to see the polo ponies and each time I could hear Red Turner set himself in the dark for a finish fight. 'Course the posse wasn't interested in ponies just then and stayed outside. Then Mr. Union Pacific decided it was time to move his train and we jerked ahead.

I was sliding the door shut when I felt Red Turner's gun in my back. I whirled on him with my fist. My mistake, because he was quicker. He clamped me one on the jaw like a locomotive piston and I went down and out.

WHEN I came to on the floor he was bathing my face and fanning me.

"Gratitude," I said, feeling around with my tongue to see if my few teeth was in their usual place.

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"Gosh, I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't know what a runty old guy you was. I was some nervous, and when you swung on me—"

"Sure," I said, "and why'd you kill that guy in Torturia? Nervous?" I said.

"Hell," he said, "I didn't kill him. I only hit him like I hit you, only harder," he said.

"Then he's dead," I said.

"Not a tough old gambler like Baldy James," he said. "Those vigilantes that chased me was after my money more than me."

"Money?" I said.

"Sure," he said. "After I hit Baldy I grabbed all the kale on the table before I beat it. It was own last month's pay, anyway. You see," he said, "we was playing red dog and those five city guys was all against me. That's okay, only Baldy dealt three times from the bottom and the third time I smacked him down. A cowboy ain't got any business in a town like Torturia. They gang up and steal him blind."

"Even the sheriff?" I said.

"Sure," he said. "He sat in the game. Maybe," he said, and I could feel him chuckle, "I got a little more than my share of the money. Maybe I got some of the sheriff's. I was in a hurry and grabbed what was in sight." He stopped laughing. "How's the jaw, old-timer?" he said, and the way he said it showed he was real concerned and I kind of liked him for it.

"What's your next move?" I said.

"Some cattle ranch," he said. "Down the line."

"You like horses?" I said.

"Sometimes I get off one to eat, sometimes to sleep and once too often I got off to play red dog," he said. "Outside of that I'm always on a horse. We get along okay, horses and me."

"You're in the presence of the four best ponies in the world," I said. "Worth five thousand each."

"Five thousand what?" he said.

"Dollars," I said.

He went over to the tank and got some more water and washed my face with it. "Damn me, I wish I hadn't hit you so hard," he said. "Sure didn't think I could knock you screwy."

"Honest," I said. "Five thousand dollars wouldn't buy Black Burt or Dizzy, or even Lady Jane. They're the best polo ponies in the world."

"You sound like a phonograph record," he said. "You told the posse that so many times I'm sick of hearing it."

"Just trying to get you interested, that's all," I said. "Thought maybe you'd join on. Little Andy Andrews, my assistant trainer, I had to put him off at Barstow. He got car-sick." Later I found that Andy had appendicitis and damn near died, but I didn't know it then. "I can't chaperone these horses all alone," I said. "Seybourne Weston is a grand guy, but he won't never exercise his ponies and I sure can't do it alone. Not at my age," I said. "Now if you got any gratitude—" Then I broke off. "You feel under my bunk in the corner, will you?"

He brought out the Scotch bottle. "Gratitude," he said and we passed it back and forth.

We managed to make that bottle last till morning. Then Red Turner slid open the car door and we was crossing into Wyoming.

He looked out at the big ranches for a long time, kind of homesick, then he turned to me and I really saw him for the first time.

He was just a kid, a red-haired whipcord of a long-legged kid, plenty reckless and wild—you could see it in his face—but with straight blue eyes and plenty of heart, the right kind of heart.

"You're a grand guy," he said. "I guess I'll stick with you and the polo ponies." He picked up a pail to water the ponies.

That's how I got the famous Red Turner, the Torturia Kid, as my assistant, and that's the way he got into polo which he sure turned upside down.

Man, how he sat the polo world on its tail!

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JUST like I said, Seybourne Weston didn't pay any attention to his polo ponies when we got to Meadowland Club on the Island. He was more interested in night clubs and dancing and a blonde named Eloise Tapping. It was a dirty shame because the tryouts was coming in three weeks and they was going to pick an International Cup team to meet the Argentine and the English teams.

'Course Weston was a cinch to play on the team and didn't need any practice or condition. He is one grand polo player and anything he lacks his ponies make up for. When he rides Black Burt or Dizzy there ain't a combination in the country can beat them. Knowing that, he'd only come out to the pole field for a few minutes every afternoon. That put it up to me and Red Turner. To exercise the ponies, I mean. Red Turner was the guy, of course.

Every day for three weeks he raced those ponies up and down the field, wheeling them on a dime, leaning first one side, then the other and yipping like all good polo players. Man, could he ride! He was the best natural rider I ever saw. Better even than Seybourne Weston.

To give the ponies real practice he always used a ball and a mallet, so's the ponies would keep their mind on the game. At first Red couldn't smack the ball but all of a sudden he got the hang of it. His wrists was strong like cast iron gas pipe and those blue eyes of his sure could measure distance. So smack, bang, would go the ball and thud, thud, his ponies after it. And they'd wheel and swing and smack the ball again. Smart! Those ponies in three weeks made a polo player out of Red Turner.

THEN it happened. Coming back from a roadhouse one night Seybourne Weston couldn't decide which turn to make, so he went straight ahead. His 'steen horsepower car piled into an oak tree and they carried off Weston half-dead to the hospital.

The next day was the first try-out for the International team and man howdy, was there excitement! Everyone wondering whether Seybourne Weston was dead or alive, whether he'd ever play polo again. This committee and that committee was appointed to study the situation. If you believed what you heard, they had all been counting on Seybourne Weston and his ponies to win the International Cup single-handed.

This committee and that committee finally made up their minds, if any. There wasn't a chance of Weston playing for a long time but they sure didn't intend to waste Black Burt and Dizzy and Lady Jane, the three best polo ponies in the world. So they come to me.

"We're going to let Joe Warwick ride your ponies in the try-outs," an old geezer with a gray goatee told me. "Warwick is a good rider," Old Goatee said, "and we want to use those grand ponies."

"Warwick ain't going to ride them," I said. "I helped to breed these ponies and I was their midwife and I've taken care of them when they was sick and all I know is Warwick ain't going to ride them. He's too big for them and he can't shift his weight fast enough."

Old Goatee and his committee was some surprised at my talking like that. "We'll get an order from Seybourne Weston," Old Goatee said.

"All right," I said. "And tell him I'm resigning at the same time."

But they didn't get any order. Seybourne Weston was too cuckoo yet to sign anything, so Old Goatee led his committee back to me. "We got to have those ponies," he said. "Who will you let ride them?"

"The only guy I'll let ride them is The Torturia Kid," I said.

"Torturia Kid?" they said.

"Yep," I said. "Mr. Red Turner. The same. Only son of a Nevada millionaire," I said and stumped away.

After a lot of parlyvoo, they followed me to the stable and Old Goatee said, "Let's look over Mr. Turner in the morning," he said. "On the field. At nine o'clock."

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So I took Red Turner downtown that afternoon and bought him a polo outfit. We opened the packages in the gutter and rubbed mud on the duds and sent them to a quick laundry so they wouldn't look too new.

The next morning the committee looked down their aristocratic noses at Red Turner. "Yip, yip!" he yelled and he wasn't so bad and the ponies was grand, so they told him to show up that afternoon for the first tryout. They soon saw that he wasn't too hot with the ball, but the ponies carried him through and the committee told Red he was a defensive player because he and the ponies sure could ride any three men off the ball.

That's how Red Turner got in the trials for the great International Cup team. Yep, he got in. And hell popped before he got out again. Part of that hell was because of Red Turner, part because of a million-dollar blond doll and part because of that walrus-mustached, moon-faced sheriff from Torturia.

THE blonde showed first. Eloise Tapping. When she made a pass at Red Turner I thought it was because she wanted a new playmate, now that her other one, Seybourne Weston, was in the hospital, but I soon learned her wily reason.

"Good luck, Mr. Turner," she said sudden one morning, noticing him for the first time. Red had one foot in the stirrup of Black Burt and he kept it frozen there, staring at that Eloise girl with the sick look of a starving steer just before it topples. Sure, she was something to make any poor desert guy's eyes bulge and his heart jump the hurdle. A knockout—one of those blondes with brown eyes and a pink velvet complexion, not any bigger than a minute, but full of life and laugh. Dead game as she was pretty, you could see that.

"Good luck, Mr. Turner," she said the very next morning. "I'll be watching you." Red just looked like a sunset and gulped out loud.

"Hello, Red," she said the third morning. She was always down early for the tryouts, sitting in a racy little car at the sideboards. "Come over between chukkers and have a smoke with me."

The girl didn't help Red's polo any. By that time he was No. 3 on the team I called the Hard Guys. The committee had picked two International teams, two grand teams, even matched as two bulldogs. One was a bunch of sinewy, hard-headed old timers like Tommy Hotchkiss and Eric Sudbury; the other was four hard-riding, hell-for-leather kids. For knock-down and drag-out polo give me the Hard Guys with their stamina and experience. But the Millionaire Kids was plenty good and the papers was full of guessing which team would be picked to play the English team.

Red Turner was temporary at No. 3 on the Hard Guys' team because the committee figured he needed experience behind him. No. 3, you know, is mostly supposed to take the ball from the other team and knock it a mile back up the field to his own No. 1 or No. 2. A strong defensive man and a hard hitter makes a good No. 3 and Red Turner sure was both. With that wrist of his he could knock the ball out of the lot, but mostly he was on the team because when he was aboard Black Burt or Dizzy or Lady Jane he could ride everybody off the field.

But hell was beginning to boil. Red Turner always played against Earl Tapping, the blond girl's brother. He was a nice, fair-haired boy and a good rider, only Red rode him off the ball every time he got near it, absolutely smothered poor Tapping so bad that sometimes he must have wanted to cry. I should have seen what was coming.

"Why don't you come over to the house for tea this afternoon?" that Eloise girl said the next morning. "See you later."

INSTEAD of eating that noon with me at Hostlers' Inn, Red beat it downtown. When he came back all his red-dog money from Torturia was gone but he sure looked like something.

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"May I be allowed, Sir Walter Chesterfield," I said, "to brush that speck of dust off your royal shoes?"

He grinned kind of sheepish. "Couldn't wear my cow clothes all the time," he said.

"Umph!" I said. Just the same, the haberdasher clerk who had taken all his red-dog money had given him something for it. Brown suit, brown hat, green shirt and tie—just the right combination for that red-haired Torturia Kid. Also he played a rotten game of polo that day. Me, I was so plumb disgusted with him that after the game I shut myself up in the stable with a bottle of Scotch.

Maybe I went to sleep. Anyway it was dark when I heard a car drive up and some voices. Red Turner and Eloise Tapping. From the way they sounded they had been using highballs instead of tea.

"You go in and look at the ponies," she said, "and then I'll take you home. Where do you live?"

"I—I live with some relatives," he said. "You just drop me. It's right near."

Instead of that she got out of the car with him and they both came into the stable. I could see them in the yellow light over the door but they couldn't see me. She was all nifty in a sport dress and he was tall and brown in his new clothes, only his hat was tipped to one side too much.

"You love horses, don't you?" she said, up-ending a water pail and sitting down on it for a confidential talk.

"Sure," Red said. "They're grand."

She looked at him out of the corner of her eye and smiled real sweet. "Would you like a real job with horses?" she said. "Taking over my dad's stable. In charge of it all. He's breeding some grand ponies, you know. That's why he's so anxious for Earl to make the team. There's always been a Tapping on the International team," she said.

"Sure," he said.

"Earl's got to get on the team this year. It'll break Dad's heart if he don't. Earl's heart, too."

Red Turner didn't say anything. Maybe he was thinking of the way he had ridden Earl Tapping off the ball a dozen times that day. Maybe likely he wasn't thinking anything, just staring at that blonde.

"You would have that job," she said. "Only if you get it you'll have to do something for us. Make a real sacrifice."

Red Turner's mouth dropped a little open but he nodded.

"What I mean," she said, "is that you'll have to help Earl get on the International team."

"Help?" he said.

"Yes," she said. "You can make him look grand out on the field. You can let him out-ride you just a little and take the ball away from you a few times. You can pick on the other fellows more. Leave Earl alone so he can score."

RIGHT there Red Turner looked like a fish out of water. He gulped and gasped and swallowed hard. Fish? Lobster. Just as red as a boiled lobster and just as mad as a boiling lobster.

"You mean," he said real slow, "you mean you want me to double-cross my team, double-cross Tommy Hotchkiss and Eric Sudbury and Cec Robinson, double-cross those grand guys? You mean," he said, "to throw my team down?"

"Well," she said and smiled inviting, "you could just take it easy. It'd be worthwhile."

He nodded real slow and walked over to her. "I see why you've been friendly to a dumb guy like me," he said. "I was wondering. I thought you liked me. But you're a calculating little devil. You little soft-faced double-crosser!" That was the high-balls talking in him, but I wasn't sorry.

He had her by the wrists and he pulled her off that water pail like nobody's business and he sat down on the pail himself. "If you was a man I'd smack you on the jaw until it broke in five places," he said. "You ain't a man but you sure got something coming to you."

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He pulled her down on him, pulled her across his knees. Man, he spanked her, sport dress and all, spanked her good. "Not everybody can play fast and loose with a desert guy," he said, "and get away with it."

He put her on her feet. Her pink velvet complexion was gone and she was white as a tombstone. She reached and got a quirt from the wall. She slashed it across his face. He laughed at her. She slashed again and he laughed a hard laugh, standing and taking it. I could see the red welts.

"That's enough," he said, "or I'll spank you again. Now get out. Get out," he said. "Get out!"

The car started in a minute and she was gone. Red Turner stood and looked at the door. He was kind of withered, collapsed. His arms hung long and his knees seemed bent. Then he slid back to Black Burt's stall. He stayed there with Black Burt. The damn blessed kid, all twisted and hurt inside.

HOT diggity dog! That trial match the next day between the Hard Guys and the Millionaires was the damnedest polo match this country has ever seen. Craziest, maddest, most reckless. The team was going to be picked that night, the team to meet England in the first of the International matches. Those players was all out for glory or death. But the wildest, most terrible guy was Red Turner.

You could swear he was trying to commit suicide the way he rode. He didn't stay at No. 3. He was driving that ball down towards the goal every split second. His jaw was lean and hard, his eyes like frost, his face white. He inspired Black Burt in the first chukker and Dizzy in the second. They rode circles around everything in sight. They rode off one, two, three men in a dozen of their wild dashes.

And poor Earl Tapping! Every time he got near the ball a cyclone hit him, a Nevada cyclone and a Rocky Mountain wildcat and a buzz saw. He couldn't even get a smell of the ball before Red Turner was riding him off.

Man howdy, what polo! And now the other fellows on the Hard Guys' team got inspired, too. They played circles around those Millionaire Kids, scored goal after goal. And leading them, driving them, inspiring them was the youngest one of the lot, Red Turner from Torturia.

Proud! I could hardly keep my feet on the ground. Like a swelled-up balloon I was, scared to death, too, scared for that kid out there riding so reckless and like suicide. Then, sudden, my balloon burst. A guy was talking to me.

"You double-crossed us," he said. "You had Red Turner in that car with the ponies all the time."

I looked. Then I looked away real quick. Sure, it was that walrus-mustached, moon-faced sheriff from Torturia. "I got a notion to arrest you, too," he said.

"Me too?" I said. "Who's the other guy you're arresting?"

"Red Turner, of course. I got the papers here," he said, patting his big chest. "We saw Red's picture with some other polo players in the Sunday paper and I was on the train in two hours. Now I'll go out and get him," he said.

"You damn fool," I said, fighting for time, "you can't go out on the field now. You'd get killed. Sure you would. This crowd here," I said, pointing to the dowagers and dudes and millionaire aristocrats, "this crowd is made up mostly of gangsters. They'd mob any guy who stopped this game now. They'd kill him," I said.

The sheriff looked at me to see if I was kidding him.

"Watch the game," I said. "You'll never have another chance to see its like."

"I came for Red Turner," he said.

"Sure," I said, "you can get him after the game."

"Maybe," he said, "and maybe he won't be here."

Just then Red came galloping down the side-boards. The ball had been knocked out right near us and the two teams lined up to put it in play. The kid ran his eye over the crowd. He saw the sheriff. His mouth dropped open and he just sat there

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on Lady Jane looking at the sheriff while the ball was knocked away. Then he turned and looked hungry at the gate at the far end of the field.

"See?" said the sheriff. "He's planning to make his getaway right now."

"Nuts," I said. "He'll finish this game. And after the game you can arrest him. Tell you what I'll do," I said real generous, "I'll give you a horse so he can't possibly get away. He'll be riding Dizzy in the last chukker and she'll be all tired out. I'll give you Black Burt. Black Burt's faster than Dizzy and he'll be fresh. You'll feel at home on a horse. Sure, Red can't get away from you."

The sheriff patted the gun at his side. "Just let him try to get away," he said.

Just then the crowd let out a roar, a funny kind of roar, a scared kind of roar. Wham, smash! Just like that it always happens on a polo field. A woman screamed and some men shouted and then everything was quiet, waiting for something terrible.

SIX men were galloping hell-bent down the field, every muscle of horse and rider straining ahead. In front was that little, yellow-haired Earl Tapping and right at his heels was Red Turner, his hair glinting in the sun. The other four were bunched, head to flank, riding like a cavalry troop. Man, the thud-thud of it, the yips and all made your heart swell.

Tapping didn't weigh a hundred forty and his pony—fourteen hands plus—was too big for him, making him lean overmuch when he swung at the ball. Just the same he had whacked it once and put it in front of the goal. He was ready for the second whack. Going to make a score or die for it, that boy was. No goal or die if Red Turner could stop him. Tapping's mallet started to swing. He leaned far over, his mallet cutting a white circle. Then he found himself looking Death in the eye.

His off stirrup had broke. He pitched out, carried by his wild swinging mallet. He pitched right in front of Red Turner and Lady Jane, right in front of those four other hell-for-leather ponies. That was when the hysterical woman screamed and men shouted; that was when they all went sudden quiet, scared quiet.

Sure, Lady Jane would leap clear of him—any pony will if you give her a chance. But those other four—flank to head! Not a chance of getting clear. Hoofs into Earl Tapping, probably several hoofs, sharp ones; horses and riders down in a heap, rolling on him—I could see it all before it happened. So could that dead-quiet crowd.

Don't ask me just how Red Turner did it. I don't know. It's a cowboy trick, I guess, but no one ever pulled what Red did that day.

Earl Tapping never reached the ground, or if he reached it, he bounded up again, up on the lever of Red Turner's long arm. Red had gone down the side of his horse, way down, his lanky body arched. His hand caught Tapping's wide canvas belt. The strain was terrific, killing, the jerk of the horse, the jerk of Tapping's body. A muscle-tearing, shoulder,dislocating strain. Red clung to that little postage stamp of a pommel on his polo saddle, sliding slowly sideways. His face was white with pain and his jaw was harder than ever I saw it. His eyes blinked with the strain of it all. They were balanced, the three of them—Tapping and Red and Lady Jane—just balanced ahead of four thundering horses. Red would have to let go, drop Tapping under those flashing hoofs behind him.

He didn't let go. Slow, so slow that every man in that crowd ached for him, he raised Earl Tapping inch by inch, up, up Lady Jane's foreflank, up to her neck. He held Tapping there and the ponies all finally got stopped. Then Red Turner put Earl Tapping on the ground, and he fell off Lady Jane himself, his arm hanging limp and useless—ligaments all torn haywire.

THE crowd all of a sudden could breathe again. It was like wind in the trees. Then some quick, nervous voices sounded—a cheer wrenched right out of that cold-blooded bunch of aristocrats,

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only they wasn't cold-blooded at that minute.

Eloise Tapping was out on the field, feeling of her brother to make sure he was safe, but looking at Red Turner with big eyes, kind of wondering about him. Then someone moved at my side. It was Old Walrus Mustache, the sheriff.

"I'll get him now," he said.

"Sure," I said. "There's Black Burt. Better get aboard," I said. "You'll feel more natural and safer that way. Besides, Red might try to run and you're too fat to catch him." He turned to Black Burt and I ran out on the field with an old polo ball in my hand. "Red!" I yipped. "Beat it! The sheriff!"

He gave one jump and was on Lady Jane's back, heading for the gate. I pressed the old polo ball into the hand of that Eloise Tapping. "When Black Burt comes r'aring by, throw this!" I yelled. "Throw it the other way. No, the other way!"

She threw it. Just as Black Burt came galloping by with the sheriff she gave the ball a big toss the other way. It happened just like I thought. Black Burt saw the ball. He swung on his haunches, swung on a dime, to go after it. Only the sheriff didn't swing. He couldn't stop going straight ahead. You could see a foot of air between him and the saddle and then the saddle was gone and so was Black Burt, leaving the sheriff sitting up there four feet above ground.

He reached ground real heavy, landing on his fat haunches. It seemed to jar some sense out of him, for he just blinked. Then, sitting there in the midst of millionaires, dowagers and dudes, the Sheriff of Torturia whipped his gun from his holster and fired it in the air three times. Calling for help he was, like he had been taught to do. But the crowd, seeing him sitting there so fat and like a turtle and Black Burt steaming in the other direction, haw-hawed very common-like.

I looked down at the end of the field. Lady Jane and Red Turner were through the gate now, his long arm hanging limp and loose, his hair glinting in the sun, his face still white from pain, but riding helity-larrup. Across the highway he went, into a private estate beyond. He and Lady Jane galloped up the hill, headed west. At the top of the hill I saw him again. He turned to look and the sun sure was copper-red on his hair. Then he nudged over the hill and was gone.

THE English team won the International Cup but the American boys played a whale of a game. Earl Tapping was in there and worked his little head off; so did Tommy Hotchkiss, Cec Robinson and Eric Sudbury, but the English boys were just too good.

Me, I didn't care. My ponies wasn't in the scrap. Nor my heart. Fact is, we didn't even wait to see it. Seybourne Weston was leaving the hospital and the doctors ordered him out West to his ranch to get well. 'Course he wanted his ponies along, so he gave me the shipping orders. We had Lady Jane back—found her tied to the stable the next morning.

All the time the sheriff with the walrus mustache was hanging around watching me, thinking that Red Turner would be sure to show up. I thought maybe he would, too, and I got real heavy in my mind, if any, when he didn't.

At the first stop outside of New York City something funny happened. There was a pounding at the door of the car. "That sheriff," I said to myself. "Going to search the car again."

I slid the door open and gave a kick out in the night. It caught the guy right under the jaw and sent him backwards. "Take that back to Torturia with you," I said. "Registered."

A long figure came up off the ground and a hand rose to a sore jaw.

"Aw," said a voice, "why'd you do that, Buck?"

Bless my damn old heart, it was Red Turner. He had ridden the tops that far and now, bless me, he was coming inside with me and the ponies.

I yanked him up and put an arm around

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him, "Red, you long-legged son of a gun, you!"

"Buck," he said, "you runty little tail twister."

We hung on to each other because the train began to swing again. Five days later when we got near Torturia the kid made himself scarce under the hay. Me, I acted natural. We bumped to a stop in that little Nevada tank town and I slid open the door. Then I blinked and swallowed hard.

Right beside the car track was a sporty little roadster. In the roadster was that Eloise Tapping. Beside her sat that walrus-mustached sheriff. They were both grinning and laughing and calling.

"Bring him out," that sheriff said.

The girl nodded. "It's all right," she said. "Everything's been squared." She looked at the sheriff and he nodded. "Sure, it's all fixed up by my dad," she said. "Tell Red to come out. I want to see him real bad."

The way she said it I knew it was true so I sent Red out. He dropped from the car right beside the roadster. The sheriff held out one hand to him and the girl held out two.

He didn't seem to see the sheriff's hand. Anyway, he took the girl's, both of them, and they hung on tight.

Our train gave a bump and a jerk and we began to move westward, again. "See you at the next International Cup trials," Red Turner yelled at me. "So long, Buck!"

"Sure," I said.

I hung out that door as long as Torturia was in sight and all that time Red Turner was hanging on to the hands of Eloise Tapping. Or maybe she was hanging on to him. I don't know.

Hot! If hell is any hotter than the Mojave Desert was that night I'll resign from hell. But some way I didn't suffer much. I felt kind of good in my mind, I guess, thinking of Red Turner.

THE END

An Exclusive Organization

THE famed "Caterpillar Club," composed of men and women fliers who have had to abandon their planes in mid-air and make forced parachute landings, hails as its Chief Caterpillar Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh. This well known American airman has had to bail out of his ship four times, one more than his nearest competitor. One of Colonel Lindbergh's forced landings was made upon a barbed-wire fence in Texas.

Recently another member was admitted into this exclusive circle, in the person of 2nd Lieutenant LeRoy A. Rainey, U. S. Army airman stationed at Barksdale Field, La. The army flier made his descent under unusually dramatic conditions, bailing out of a flaming plane at a high altitude.

Flying a reconnaissance solo patrol flight over the Louisiana bottoms recently, Lieutenant Rainey was stunned to see long streams of fire burst from about his machine's engine. Sticking to his controls as long as possible and diving his ship, the Army man at last saw he would have to take off. He got away to a short jump, but just as the rip-cord was pulled, the machine swerved and Rainey landed in the wires of the vertical fin.

Crawling out on the wing in preparation for another jump was impossible. As the ground rushed up at him the flier almost lost consciousness; a fortunate roll of the ship threw him clear, however, and he landed safely.

—*Herbert E. Smith.*

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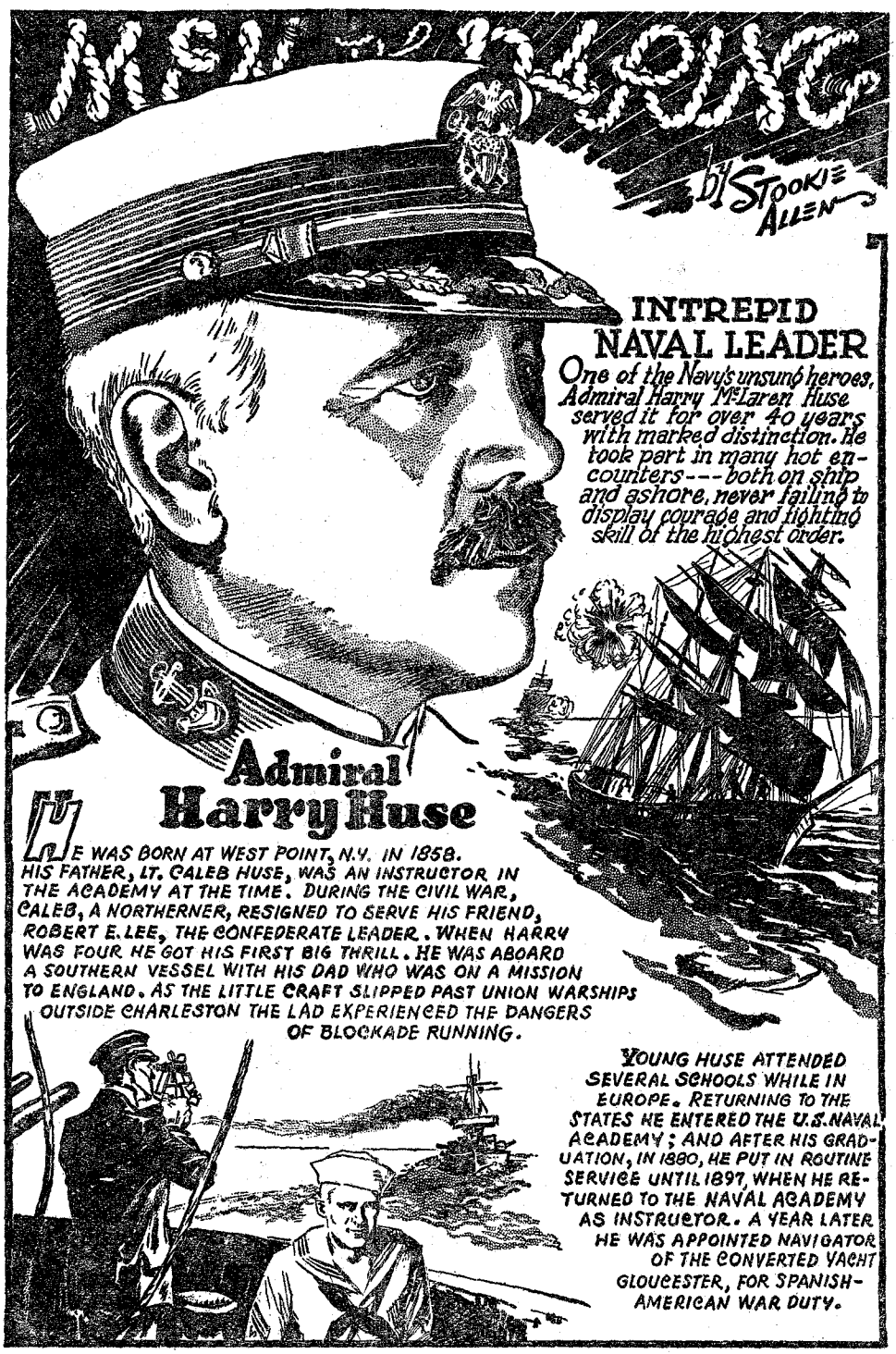
MEN OF VALOR
By STOOKIE ALLEN
INTREPID NAVAL LEADER
One of the Navy's unsung heroes, Admiral Harry McLaren Huse served it for over 40 years with marked distinction. He took part in many hot encounters---both on ship and ashore, never failing to display courage and fighting skill of the highest order.
Admiral Harry Huse
HE WAS BORN AT WEST POINT, N.Y. IN 1858. HIS FATHER, LT. CALEB HUSE, WAS AN INSTRUCTOR IN THE ACADEMY AT THE TIME. DURING THE CIVIL WAR, CALEB, A NORTHERNER, RESIGNED TO SERVE HIS FRIEND, ROBERT E. LEE, THE CONFEDERATE LEADER. WHEN HARRY WAS FOUR HE GOT HIS FIRST BIG THRILL. HE WAS ABOARD A SOUTHERN VESSEL WITH HIS DAD WHO WAS ON A MISSION TO ENGLAND. AS THE LITTLE CRAFT SLIPPED PAST UNION WARSHIPS OUTSIDE CHARLESTON THE LAD EXPERIENCED THE DANGERS OF BLOCKADE RUNNING.
YOUNG HUSE ATTENDED SEVERAL SCHOOLS WHILE IN EUROPE. RETURNING TO THE STATES HE ENTERED THE U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY; AND AFTER HIS GRADUATION, IN 1880, HE PUT IN ROUTINE SERVICE UNTIL 1897, WHEN HE RETURNED TO THE NAVAL ACADEMY AS INSTRUCTOR. A YEAR LATER HE WAS APPOINTED NAVIGATOR OF THE CONVERTED YACHT GLOUCESTER, FOR SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR DUTY.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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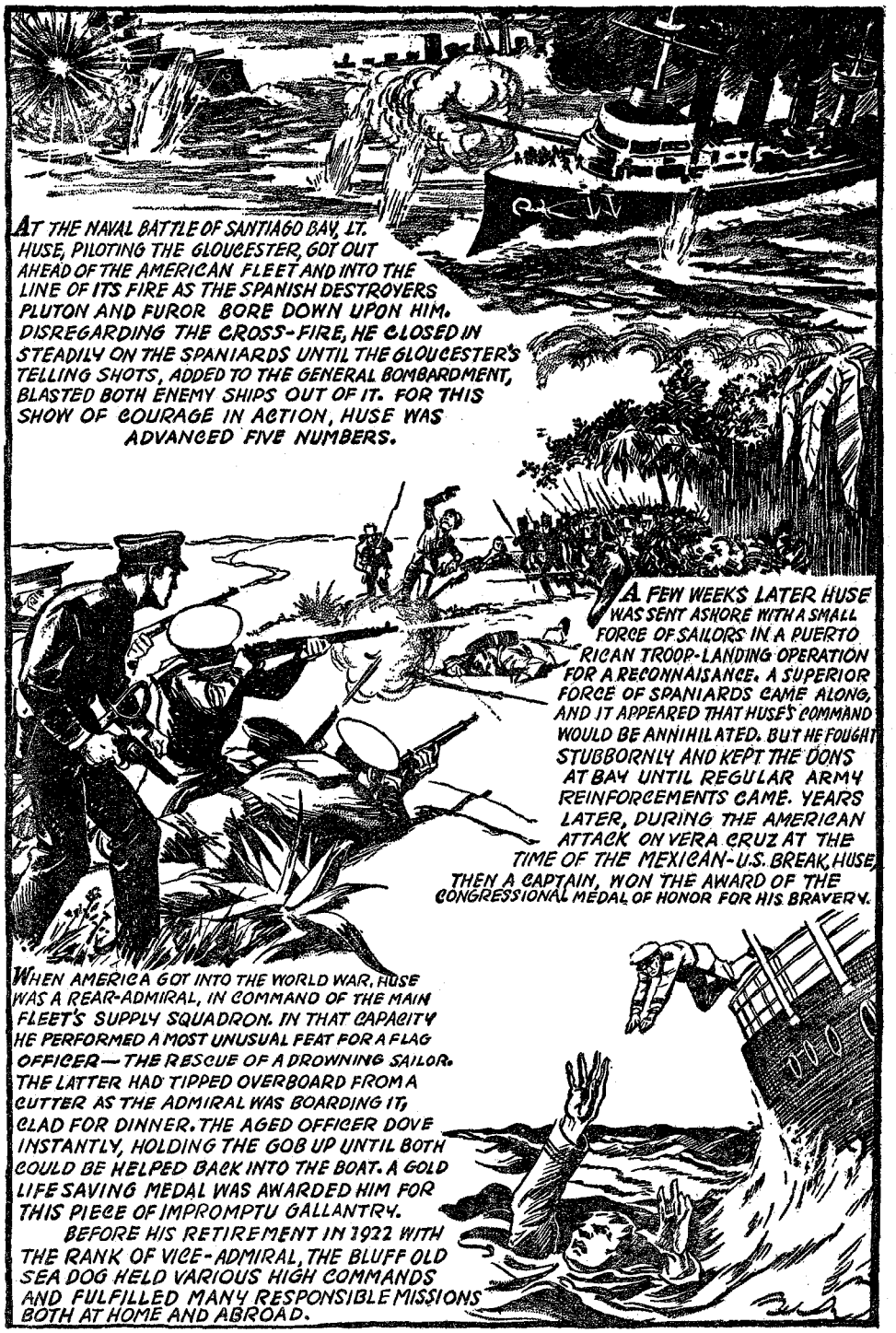
AT THE NAVAL BATTLE OF SANTIAGO BAY, LT. HUSE, PILOTING THE GLOUCESTER, GOT OUT AHEAD OF THE AMERICAN FLEET AND INTO THE LINE OF ITS FIRE AS THE SPANISH DESTROYERS PLUTON AND FUROR BORE DOWN UPON HIM. DISREGARDING THE CROSS-FIRE, HE CLOSED IN STEADILY ON THE SPANIARDS UNTIL THE GLOUCESTER'S TELLING SHOTS, ADDED TO THE GENERAL BOMBARDMENT, BLASTED BOTH ENEMY SHIPS OUT OF IT. FOR THIS SHOW OF COURAGE IN ACTION, HUSE WAS ADVANCED FIVE NUMBERS.
A FEW WEEKS LATER HUSE WAS SENT ASHORE WITH A SMALL FORCE OF SAILORS IN A PUERTO RICAN TROOP-LANDING OPERATION FOR A RECONNAISANCE. A SUPERIOR FORCE OF SPANIARDS CAME ALONG, AND IT APPEARED THAT HUSE'S COMMAND WOULD BE ANNIHILATED. BUT HE FOUGHT STUBBORNLY AND KEPT THE DONS AT BAY UNTIL REGULAR ARMY REINFORCEMENTS CAME. YEARS LATER, DURING THE AMERICAN ATTACK ON VERA CRUZ AT THE TIME OF THE MEXICAN-U.S. BREAK, HUSE, THEN A CAPTAIN, WON THE AWARD OF THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR FOR HIS BRAVERY.
WHEN AMERICA GOT INTO THE WORLD WAR, HUSE WAS A REAR-ADMIRAL, IN COMMAND OF THE MAIN FLEET'S SUPPLY SQUADRON. IN THAT CAPACITY HE PERFORMED A MOST UNUSUAL FEAT FOR A FLAG OFFICER—THE RESCUE OF A DROWNING SAILOR. THE LATTER HAD TIPPED OVERBOARD FROM A CUTTER AS THE ADMIRAL WAS BOARDING IT, CLAD FOR DINNER. THE AGED OFFICER DOVE INSTANTLY, HOLDING THE GOB UP UNTIL BOTH COULD BE HELPED BACK INTO THE BOAT. A GOLD LIFE SAVING MEDAL WAS AWARDED HIM FOR THIS PIECE OF IMPROMPTU GALLANTRY.
BEFORE HIS RETIREMENT IN 1922 WITH THE RANK OF VICE-ADMIRAL, THE BLUFF OLD SEA DOG HELD VARIOUS HIGH COMMANDS AND FULFILLED MANY RESPONSIBLE MISSIONS BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD.

Next Week: Harry Houdini, Master of Escape

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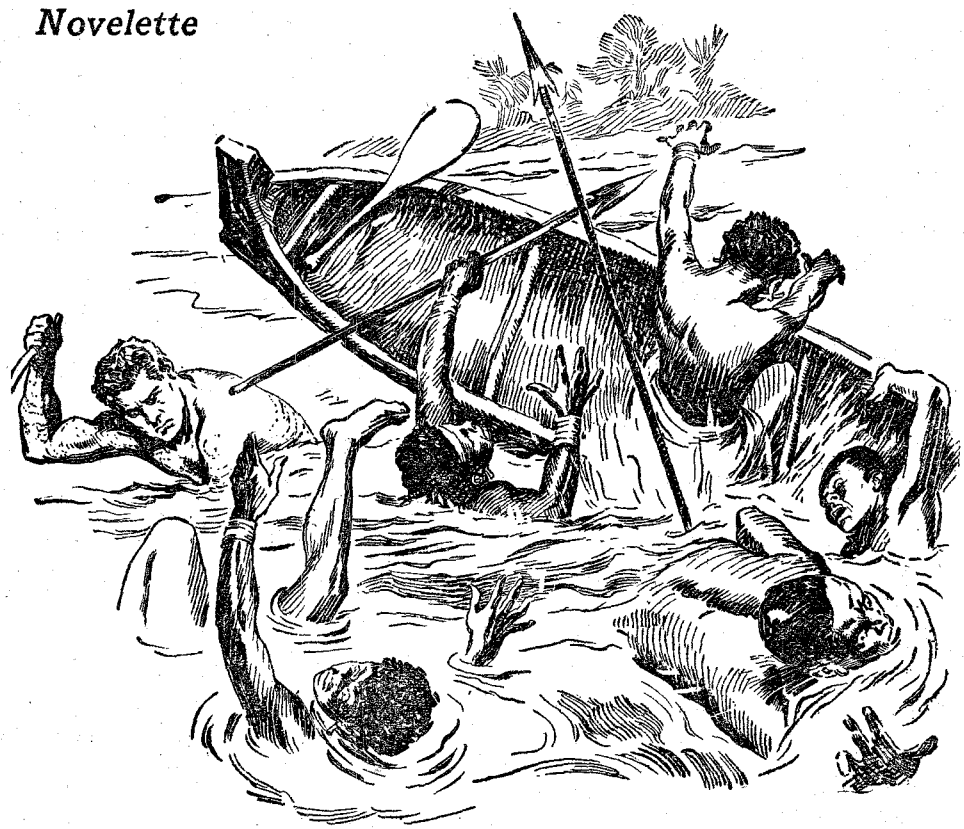
The Golden Oyster

By RALPH R. PERRY

Author of "Fangs of the Fetish," "The Forty Dead Men," etc.

Novelette



Bill plunged in with his knife

Bellow Bill Williams, South Seas pearler, dives for a $5,000,000 prize

CHAPTER I.

DEATH HARBOR.

"BELLOW BILL! Bellow Bill Williams!" Through the dull splash of the anchor in the purple-black of the South Seas lagoon and the echoing rattle of the anchor chain the tense, excited whisper barely reached the ears of the big tattooed pearling skipper who was addressed. The speaker was invisible. The voice seemed to come from the concealment afforded by the overhang of the stern of the pearling schooner—but Bellow Bill was grimly aware that neither boat nor swimmer had been moving in the harbor of Moluna a minute ago when he had swung his schooner into the wind and hurried forward

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from the steering wheel to drop anchor.

As always, he was handling his vessel alone. In the few moments required to drop anchor, then, someone had stolen out to hail him. Ashore the coco palms waved like silhouettes in black ink, a hundred yards away. From the village of Moluna there was not a glimmer of light. It was that black-dark hour before the dawn, and in the whole South Seas only two people knew that he was coming to Moluna.

Why shouldn't Norman-Pierce, the Resident and Governor of the island, or his protégé Professor Griswold, carry a lantern? Why shouldn't they wait for him ashore, and get their sleep?

"Aye, aye," Bellow Bill answered in a whisper that was like the growl of a mastiff. His booming, reverberant voice made whispering hard. Easier, much easier for him to utter a shout that would awaken men sleeping half a mile away.

"Come here! Quickly! It's Griswold. Don't make a sound. My—er—discovery has been blabbed. We've got to slip out of here before dawn."

No mistaking the desperate urgency of that whispered appeal. The important lines in the letter from Norman-Pierce which had summoned him to Moluna flashed through Bill's mind:

> An American professor named Alvin Griswold has made one of those amazing discoveries possible only to a scholar or a scientist. All I'll tell you is that treasure worth *at least* a million pounds is involved. $5,000,000 to you, you tattooed Yankee.
>
> He's convinced me the treasure is where he claims, and he's here with his daughter and her fiancé, calmly proposing to charter a schooner, sail to the fringes of the South Seas, dig the treasure up and carry it back. That's the kind of a chappie he is, and his future son-in-law is the sort of new-chum that believes any white man with a revolver can lick the South Seas singlehanded.
>
> It's murder to let them sail, and yet they have money and equipment and I have no legal grounds for holding them. I've warned them, however, that I'll refuse to countersign the charter of any schooner except yours. That will hold them for three weeks or so, but eventually they'll appeal to a higher official and be sustained.
>
> For old times' sake, hurry and help out this hard-pressed British official! You're an American, and I know a million pounds isn't enough to bribe you . . . you'll probably have to take a charter at freight rates, but you never did ask to see your profit in advance.
>
> Bill, the treasure is there! Griswold actually bored into it with a diamond drill, and carried the mixture of gold dust and coral dust back to the States. He had to raise money before he could dig a shaft, but he is so naïve that he actually mentioned his discovery to illustrate a lecture on philology Philology, Bill, with *at least* a million pounds at stake. But he seems to have lectured to a bunch of dry-as-dust chappies like himself, and I think the secret has been kept. What has saved Griswold is the fact that practical men think he is a dreamer . . . just another crazy professor with a crazy theory in—God help us—philology.
>
> Get here quick before I go mad myself.

And now, Bellow Bill thought grimly, a five million dollar secret had been blabbed. No wonder no lanterns were lighted, or that Griswold and Norman-Pierce had scarcely given him time to drop anchor. He walked aft, and leaned over the stern.

In the darkness he could make out the white blur of a face, and a shapeless figure balancing precariously in a small native dugout. His visitor had thrown a blanket, or a dark cloak, over his white ducks. That precaution must be due to Norman-Pierce, for the man was handling his paddle like a new-chum—a greenhorn.

"Give me your hand," he whispered. "If I try to stand up I'll fall over—"

BELLOW BILL reached out. Fingers that possessed amazing strength closed around his own huge tattooed paw. No professor ever had a grip like that. No pr—

The sky fell on Bellow Bill. He did not even feel the impact of the sock loaded with beach sand that thudded on his bare head. Fingers that were much too strong were gripping his own—and next, his head was aching, water was gurgling against the planking of the schooner close to his ear, and a light was shining into his eyes. He had been carried below decks and laid in his own bunk.

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Now Bellow Bill Williams was six feet and three inches of bone and muscle. He weighed two hundred and forty pounds. If his voice was known through the South Seas, so was the amazing display of tattooing that covered every inch of his skin from hips to neck and shoulders to wrists. There was a full-rigged ship on his chest, a Chinese dragon on his back, bracelets of rope tattooed in pale blue ink around each wrist, and a snake coiled three times around his hips.

Pearling skipper he called himself. But a strength equal to that of two ordinary men, an unsurpassed knowledge of natives, and a calculating recklessness that made him seek danger and chuckle when he found it had turned him into an adventurer whose position in the South Pacific was peculiarly his own. Bellow Bill liked to go where other men wouldn't. And as a consequence he was frequently summoned—as in the present case—for affairs that other men steered shy of.

Now to get a two hundred and forty pound man down a narrow companionway is a feat of strength. Ordinarily it is a two-man job. But through slitted eyes Bill saw one man only.

He was as big as Bill himself; blond, like the pearler, though the color of his hair was tow rather than Bill's coppery-yellow. He was young, muscled like a wrestler—and he stood stripped to the waist, a mirror in one hand and a small brush in the other, painting a rough imitation of Bill's tattooing on his own body.

He worked with fierce and desperate haste, but he wasn't doing a bad job. The masts of the full-rigged ship and the blue rope bracelets were well imitated. He was wearing a pair of Bill's duck pants, and one of Bill's singlets was tossed on the cabin table.

The pearler gave a tentative wiggle—and grimaced with pain. His hands were lashed together by the thumbs, and his feet by the big toes. A leather belt strapped his arms to his body. Bill opened his eyes wide and grinned.

"You've tied up men before, eh, lad?" he rumbled. "I dislocate my thumbs if I pull, and I can't untie knots with my fingers alone, eh? But that tattooing won't wash. I don't get the idea."

"Shut up!" was the answering growl. The brush worked frantically. The big man snatched up Bill's singlet and drew it over his head. Across the harbor sounded a guarded hail:

"Ahoy! Bellow Bill!" It was Norman-Pierce's voice.

The big man picked up a revolver and jabbed the muzzle against Bill's teeth. "Answer that, 'Ahoy! Come on aboard!'" he growled. "Not a word more or less. And yell it loud. Yell it like only Bellow Bill can yell it, savvy?"

BILL did get the idea then. That hail would identify any big man who appeared on the deck of the schooner as himself. His voice could not be copied. Dancing flecks of gold came into his eyes, but his obedience to the command was instant. His chest strained against the tight belt.

"Ahoy! Come aboard!" he roared. The cabin rang with the sound. Instantly the big man clapped a square of adhesive tape over Bill's mouth, effectively gagging him. He blew out the hurricane lantern in the cabin, and leaped up the companionway.

Bill listened. He caught the faint *thump* of a paddle against the side of a dugout. Norman-Pierce was pushing off. Bill had the minute or two the Resident would take to paddle a hundred yards. No more. His chest strained against the belt. He thrust outward with both elbows. The belt snapped, and he swung both legs over the edge of his bunk to the deck.

A twinge of agony shot up his legs from his bound toes as he stood upright. He wondered why the big man hadn't knocked him out. . . . Evidently because his voice would be needed, later, for another identification. Norman-Pierce would be brought into the cabin, and forced to answer, too. A simple, daring scheme. . . .

A slight motion of the deck made Bill fall. Bound as he was, he couldn't stand.

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But he could crawl. Like an inch-worm, on elbows and knees, he crossed the deck, clawing the adhesive from his mouth as he went. In his own cabin he needed no light. The arms-rack was against the after bulkhead. Bill rose, swaying, and lifted down a Winchester.

With his thumbs bound, the rifle was awkward to hold. He would never be able to aim it. Never be able to carry it up the companionway, either, without making a noise that would warn the man on deck. A shout or a shot would warn Norman-Pierce —now close to the schooner, and a perfect target if the man on deck cared to shoot.

Most men would have shouted or shot because they could think of nothing else to do. In that split second Bellow Bill weighed the chances, and used other tactics. He rolled to the deck and squirmed, feet first, to the bottom of the steep companionway stairs.

"Bill!" Norman-Pierce's whisper sounded urgently across the water. He wasn't ten yards away. "Hoist anchor, Bill! We're leaving tonight. Griswold's secret has been blabbed!"

"Aye, aye," growled the big man on deck in a muffled tone. The only light on deck came from the binnacle. He was standing well behind it, so that only the bulk of his head and his body against the stars would be visible to the Resident. But the binnacle light revealed one bare foot, resting on the seat behind the wheel.

Bellow Bill rested his heels high up on the companionway stairs and dropped the rifle barrel into the notch of his toes. His bound hands fumbled with the trigger. He could see the front sight, though not the rear one. He centered the bead on a white ankle, and waited, hoping the big man would move. . . . He didn't. The dugout bumped softly against the schooner.

Bill fired. "Go overboard, Pierce!" he bellowed. "Under the counter!"

THE crack of the rifle and the shout blended with a scream of pain. A bullet smashed into the side of the companionway, showering Bill with splinters. Over the side there was a splash, a man's shrill shout and a cry from a girl. As Bill jerked the loading lever the big man leaped across the companionway and dove over the rail.

"On deck, Pierce!" Bill roared. It took seconds to swing his legs around. He dropped the rifle. As he crawled up the companionway Norman-Pierce was swinging over the rail. Bill shoved the rifle toward him.

"Get him!" he roared.

"The constabulary will get him tomorrow. It's a small island, what?" the Resident retorted snappily. "The professor can't swim." He reached far over the taffrail, and bent as he lifted a weight. "I say, Bill! I saw you, and I heard you, and the two didn't register. When the rifle went off I jumped as high as—er—one of you did. Startling, what? I capsized the bally dugout without orders, 'pon my word."

Norman-Pierce grinned over his shoulder, and pulled into view a thin little man whose gray head and pointed beard, dripping wet, made Bill think of a half-drowned and indignant billy-goat. Two slim hands caught the rail. Bill got a glimpse of a figure slender and trim as that of an aerial acrobat, every curve accentuated by the thin, wet dress. Then a blond girl of twenty was sitting on the taffrail, wringing water from the hem of her garment. Her face was triangular and piquant, grave except for eyes that sparkled with excitement.

"Miss Susan Griswold—and the real Bill Williams. His roar is worse than his bite," said Norman-Pierce, without seeming to turn. He was peering at the shore. "The other tattooed gentleman seems to have vanished, temporarily. Too bad you missed him, Bill."

There was a splash of blood near the wheel. Bill leaned down and picked a small object from the waterways, holding it in his huge hand so that Norman-Pierce could see it, and the girl could not.

"I didn't—altogether," he growled. The thing in his palm was a toe, shot clean

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off. "He won't run far, I guess. And since this is a small island—who is he?"

"I don't know," retorted Norman-Pierce. "In fact, I'd have been willing to swear not only that there wasn't a man as big as that on Moluna, but that there weren't two in the South Seas." He spoke snappily, but Bellow Bill, who knew British officials and who was acquainted with the tradition that makes the true-blue Briton jest at a crisis, detected the consternation that Norman-Pierce sought to conceal by crisp speech.

CHAPTER II.

CORAL RIND AND GOLD CORE.

"ALL I do know," the Resident added, "is that every kinky-headed Melanesian savage on the beach, down to the very sago gatherers, than which there's nothing more stupid, is talking about the gold that the professor here is going to bring back from the Lieuana Islands. And the Lieuana Islands is right. I've tried to trace the leak. You can be damn sure how far I got."

"Aye," Bill rumbled. "'One fella Mary belong cousin along me gammon one fella Mary belong me, my word, yes!'" The deep voice of the pearler slid into a sarcastic imitation of the sing-song of a savage being cross-examined. "Great language for concealing information, *beche de mer*. But what are the facts, Pierce?"

"You be hoisting anchor. Run as near my bungalow as you can get. I've all the engineering supplies ready to rush aboard, with Paul Carson—that's Susan's fiancée—guarding them with a gun, and your clearance papers are in my pocket. I planned to rush you out on an hour's notice, and keep anyone from following you"

"And the lad without a toe figured he'd short-circuit the scheme," Bill rumbled.

"Quite, quite. I'll attend to him come sunrise," Norman-Pierce snapped. "But up anchor, Bill. The professor will explain while we're working."

"I wonder if either of you could give me a cigarette, too?" Susan Griswold asked in a husky contralto. She sat on the taffrail perfectly at ease, though her father was tramping the deck like a wet hen. The ducking and the blood on the deck didn't bother her at all. The request, as she made it, seemed to say: Now, after all, why get excited?

"I've got nothing but chewing tobacco," said Bill gravely. In the light of the binnacle her eyes flashed. A sense of humor, in a small party out to fight long odds, is worth more than a gun. In that second a partnership was born between Susan Griswold and Bellow Bill. "Fine-cut," he added solemnly.

"I'll try it—provided it will burn," Susan answered. Bill extended a huge fistful of the tobacco he carried loose in his hip pocket. The professor made a strangled sound of protest as the three men moved forward. He didn't speak to his daughter, however. Which was illuminating.

"You understand, Mr.—ah—Williams, that the Basque language is related to no other," he began as the pearler slipped a handspike into the anchor windlass. "I am a professor of Spanish language and literature. Verifying the independence of the Basque tongue has been my life's work."

BELLOW BILL raised an eyebrow at Norman-Pierce.

"This," said the Resident drily, "is the manner in which a scholar arrives at a five million dollar discovery. Better listen."

"Imagine the shock to me," Griswold continued indignantly, "when a colleague called my attention to the fact that the dialect of the natives of the Lieuana Islands contained a dozen words the roots of which were unquestionably Basque. My life's work was destroyed—unless I could prove that at some time a Basque had been shipwrecked on those islands. Naturally that would account for the incorporation of a few words in the dialect."

"Naturally," Bellow Bill rumbled. The anchor was away. He walked aft, with the professor's pointed beard wagging at his elbow.

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"I plunged into research—and discovered no record that a Basque had ever been within five hundred miles of the place. Even in the archives of Madrid—nothing."

"Tough," Bill rumbled.

"Disastrous," Griswold corrected. "But in an old manuscript I found a record of an old plate ship that left Panama bound for the Philippines in the year 1590. It carried so many thousand arrobas of gold, and miscellaneous treasure amounting to five million dollars or so. Not an unusual cargo at that time. What was unusual was that news of its fate came back to Spain through the sole survivor of the shipwreck. That survivor was a Basque cabin boy.

"His story was that a violent gale had carried the ship entirely over the coral ring, as he called it, of a small island. The ship was hopelessly wrecked, and the natives of that group of islands were numerous and hostile. Cannon drove them back for a time, but in the end the result was certain.

"The Spanish captain, Jaime Mendoza by name, was a man of resolution. At night, secretly, he lowered all the gold in the shallow water beside the ship, and covered it with earth and stones from the ship's ballast. To every man still alive he announced the latitude and longitude, and reminded them that under Spanish law one-fifth of that vast treasure belonged to whoever enabled the King of Spain to recover it. His purpose," Professor Griswold explained, "was to insure that a punitive expedition would destroy the savages who were about to murder him.

"But it happened that every man was killed except my Basque. He escaped, after many years, and spent nearly fifteen years getting back to Spain. His story was believed, but when a ship was sent to the latitude and longitude he gave, no islands were discovered at all."

BELLOW BILL hauled in the main sheet. The schooner began to move through the blue-black water. "And that was that," he rumbled.

"To gold-greedy fools!" contradicted the professor testily. "But to a scholar who must prove the independence of the Basque language or see his life-work crumble, the deduction was inevitable. Here was an island the dialect of which proved that a Basque once lived there. And here was an account which claimed that a Basque lived on such an island. Why should a poor Basque lie? His story would be certain to disgrace him. That Mendoza's reckoning was in error seemed much more probable to me. It was a logical certainty that that Basque had been shipwrecked on that island. To prove it to the world I had to recover the gold—"

"And so," Norman-Pierce cut in, "Professor Griswold goes to Lieuana. He finds that one island in the group is a circular atoll, and that there is an old native tradition of a shipwreck. So he examines the bottom of the lagoon and sees an odd, conical-shaped mound. In the course of centuries, coral has covered it, but he explains to the local trader that he is making a study of coral formations—astonishin' flash of insight, that—bores into the mound with a drill, and brings up gold-dust."

"How does the gold lie?" rumbled Bill.

"In less than three fathoms of water, and under less than two feet of coral. For the takin', you might say," snapped Norman-Pierce. "And yet, there it would have lain till the end of time if two—er—old scholars hadn't got to quarrelin' about a funny language only a handful of people speak. But once the trader at Lieuana—Vansteen, his name is—gets wind of the rumor that's driftin' around among my blacks . . ."

"How many holes did you bore, professor?" Bill asked.

"Dozens," said Susan slowly. "Hundreds . . . I was with father, you see."

The bow of the schooner touched lightly on the beach. Out of the shadows of the coco-palms rushed the figure of a man clad in white duck. He was brandishing a revolver.

"That's Carson—bein' impressive," said Norman-Pierce drily.

Bellow Bill noticed that Susan bit her lip with embarrassment.

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"Don't be hard on a new-chum," the pearler grumbled. "He ain't tied up, or sandbagged, is he? It's him that should be laughing at me."

Paul Carson grasped the chains under the bowsprit and swung aboard the schooner dryshod, with the ease of an athlete. He was a tall, loose-jointed man, certainly not older than twenty-three, with a short, straight nose and a wide, good-natured mouth. A likeable cuss, but lacking, Bellow Bill decided instantly, in the core of hardness essential to an adventurer.

"What was the shooting? Who did you hit? I'm rushing the natives down with the gear!" It was all uttered in a breath.

"Oh, a lad about your age and my build," drawled Bellow Bill. "You ain't seen a fella that size lurking around?"

"Why—no."

"Sound like you had," the pearler rumbled. Carson had an open face. A queer expression — chiefly incredulous amazement—had flashed across it. And his left hand had unconsciously closed into a fist. That sign of a lie is a thing for which men who deal with savages watch.

"Needn't be ashamed to admit it," Bill drawled. "He was a blond, too, and he had a red birthmark on the left side of his belly. A damn stout fella."

"No. Never saw anybody like that," denied Carson, all in a breath.

NORMAN-PIERCE and Bill exchanged a glance. There was a queer look on Susan's face, as though she were trying to remember something. Bill's great shoulders shrugged.

"Give me my clearance papers and rush the gear aboard, Mr. Resident, and I'll get underway," he decided. "What's one man more or less, in a five million dollar gamble?"

Bill had assumed the responsibility. And yet, in the breathless haste of that lading in the starlight, he made certain dispositions that Norman-Pierce watched with narrowed eyes. Griswold's gear consisted of a diving suit, an air pump, and six cases of forty percent dynamite. Bill stowed all these in the cabin, and assigned the professor and Susan quarters there.

Carson he sent to the fo'csle, with a hammock to sleep in. And as a favor to the new-chum, Bellow Bill slung the hammock himself—in good sea-going style, as tightly stretched as his big hands could pull it, and a good five feet above the deck. It would be hard for a greenhorn to get in, and harder to leave without landing on the deck with a thump.

He warned the loose-jointed youngster that at dawn he would have to roll out to sail the schooner, so that he'd better get his sleep. Norman-Pierce grinned at that command. When everything was ready for sailing the two old-timers clasped hands.

"What do you make of it?" the Resident whispered under his breath.

"Why, the big fella got on your island without your knowing, so I guess he'll leave the same way," Bill rejoined. "Carson knows who he is, all right, though the professor and the girl don't."

"A double cross?"

"Can happen, though Susan seems like too smart a gal to fall in love with a rat. I'll find out, before dawn."

Norman-Pierce dropped over the bowsprit onto the beach. Bellow Bill backed the mainsail. The schooner gathered sternway and slid off into the blue-black water.

CHAPTER III.

THE NAME ON THE BULLET.

THROUGH the jungle a blond man was staggering. One foot left a crimson blot at each stride. He was whimpering with pain and rage. Vines clutched at him like fingers; leaves wet with the night dew slapped at his face; the faint trail, hard to follow by day, made the mile he must cover seem endless.

At last he heard the beat of surf on the outer reef. Before him rose the stiltlike roots of a pandamus palm, covered with a thick growth of parasitic plants into which he dived with a sob of relief. Hands caught him.

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"My foot!" he snarled. "God, I'm bleeding like a pig!"

Under the pandamus it was dark as a pit. Men stirred. There was a curse in Dutch as someone fell over a native dugout, which had been lifted from the water and concealed.

"Damn it, strike a light, Vansteen!" snarled the blond man. "We'll have to lam out of here. They'll sail now, as Tari warned us!"

"*Ja?* It was your plan, Meinherr Dolin." Calm and implacable, that voice. A match spurted, and set an oil-nut alight. In the smoky, yellowish flare a round head whose hair had been shaved off bent over the wounded man. To the suffering and death of others Jan Vansteen was indifferent. "Maybe you bleed too much? Perhaps you tell all about the gold now, *ja?*"

"Think I'm a mug? You'd cut my throat!" Dolin snarled. "You'll never get that out of me!"

"You don't know," Vansteen grunted, but from the dugout he lifted a handful of kapok, which he clapped on the wound and bound in place with his handkerchief. The oil-nut, blazing higher, revealed two natives in the background. One of these was a fat and greasy black who wore around his neck for an amulet the top of a human skull strung on a string. He had a man's finger bone thrust through the septum of a nose. The other native was a young boy whose eyeballs rolled in terror.

"You say there is a shipload of gold on my island because your uncle, who is a professor, heard another professor say so," Vansteen went on in cold and heavy irony. "You say we must come here and spy on the Griswolds, and now you say run! Bah, you take too much on yourself, my American friend. *I* tell you what to do, and you come back whining because you have cut your toe. You must do better, or I *will* cut your throat."

"Is that so?" They glared at one another in the smoky light. It was the Dutchman's eyes that fell. Dolin's big fingers, that were hooked into talons, relaxed. "You don't fool me, you Dutch pig. I need you and you need me, now. Afterwards we'll settle. You can divide or shoot it out and I'll meet you half way in either, get me? But don't you call me yellow! *You* wouldn't go and slug that tattooed sailor. *You* told me not to kill him! Bellow Bill! Hell, with that name I thought he must be a big bag of wind. Damn his soul, I'll put a bullet through his gut the next time I see him. I tied him up so a snake couldn't get loose, and the next thing I knew he shot off my foot!"

"To kidnap Bill was a good idea," retorted the Dutchman. "Unless he was alive to hail the Resident, the Englishman would never set foot on the schooner. So that also was a good idea. Think, *meinherr,* and do not snarl at me like a dog until there is a bone. *I* am the trader of Lieuana! Will I stick my head in a noose because a strange American comes to me with a tale of gold that someone else has heard of?

"To come here and lie hidden was to do much. Already my natives have robbed my godowns. To send my witch-doctor Nauma to find Tari here, and to warn him that unless he spies on the Englishman Nauma will put a spell on his father and mother back in Lieuana—that is simple. But why should *I* commit a crime until I am sure there is gold? Now that I do believe there may be . . . perhaps it would be a good idea if you did shoot Bellow Bill . . . in Lieuana. . . .We will see. A dugout with two paddlers is faster than a schooner. We will be back at my islands first."

"Why me?"

"Because if I turned you over to Bellow Bill, and told him, 'Here is a stranger I found hiding in the bush on my islands,' Bill might trust me," grunted Vansteen. "Enough to drink a glass of schnapps . . . once. I would take the antidote to the poison in the glasses before I drank. Then it would be very simple, and I should not need you at all."

Again the glances of the two men locked, and this time Dolin licked his lips nervously.

"You're a cold devil," he said.

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"*Ja,*" Vansteen agreed complacently. "I am a trader, and I risk nothing until I must. I will give you advice, but I tell you now, *meinherr*—you are a new-chum who has nothing but the gun I loaned you, and I am the trader of Lieuana, with every native in my debt and Nauma to put ideas in their thick heads. All you can carry out is a murder—and we will not be equal partners until you bring me Bellow Bill dead."

Dolin nodded briefly. "That won't be long," he said. "What'll we do with Tari? He can't go back to the Resident again."

"No, but why kill him?" Vansteen answered calmly. "He can come with us. We shall need him to paddle."

He motioned to the natives to pick up the dugout. They were through the surf, squared away before the trade wind and speeding with two paddles to help the sail, long before the bowsprit of Bellow Bill's schooner poked through the channel in the reef, and headed for Lieuana under plain sail.

IN the moderate breeze Bellow Bill could easily have carried topsails. He might have set a more direct course for the island group two hundred odd miles away. The fact was that he wanted the schooner to sail herself. The wheel was in the becket, and Bellow Bill was not even aft, but forward—belly down on the deck near the open fo'csle hatch, his ear against the planking directly above Carson's hammock.

An explanation of the confusion that had appeared on the young man's face seemed to the pearler a matter far more important than speed. That he was engaged in a race he had no idea. He listened to the faint squeak of the hammock ring-bolts, which were not a foot from his ear.

Carson was restless. Any landlubber in a sailor's hammock for the first time would be that. But Carson's restlessness continued long, long after a man who had been up half the night should be asleep, and at last came the sound that Bellow Bill half expected—the thud of Carson's body on the deck below, and an oath, instantly stifled. Carson had tried to get up quietly, and had ended, as was almost inevitable for a landlubber, by falling.

Like a snake Bill's huge body crawled to the hatchway. There was a long silence, then a sigh of relief from Carson, followed by a *click* of a snap-lock on a suitcase. Another silence—and then the sound of paper being torn.

Bill vaulted down the hatchway. Carson had just time to cry out, once, before huge arms gripped him, squeezing the breath from his lungs. From his hand something dropped with a thud.

"Steady, lad," Bill rumbled. "Make a move and I'll smack your teeth down your throat.

"I—I . . . a drink of water . . ."

"Belay that," Bill growled. He stepped back and put a match to the lantern hanging from the beams. On the deck lay a thick mechanical engineer's handbook. Clenched in Carson's fist was the fly-leaf from the volume. He didn't want to give it up, but Bill opened his fist with an almost contemptuous push with a thumb, and smoothed the paper out. It was inscribed:

Floyd Dolin, '34

Above the signature was an amateurish but unmistakable sketch of the heavily muscled blond giant who had sandbagged Bill.

"You damned double crossing rat," Bill purred like a cat that has caught a mouse. "So—you didn't see anybody? You mess of sheep guts! Murder would have been aboveboard, anyhow."

"I saw—nobody," Carson gulped. Bill struck him in the mouth with the back of his hand. He staggered, but he did not cringe. Blood ran down his lips. He gathered himself, and leaped at Bill's throat, swinging a wild blow. Bill snapped a fist to the unguarded chin. Carson dropped like a sack, and the pearler stood over him, breathing hard through his nostrils.

Treachery maddened the pearler. He picked up Carson's gun, shoved it into his own pocket, searched the suitcase swiftly without finding anything incriminating.

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The younger man was beginning to stir. Bill gagged him with a sock, and tied him hand and foot with the rope of the hammock lashing.

"I haven't been in the States since the war," he rumbled. His lips barely moved. "But I've heard that up there they are getting tough pretty young. Tough! I'm going to show you what being tough is like."

HE picked Carson up and set his back against a deck stanchion, reaching around him so that one great tattooed arm was around his chest. He hooked his foot around Carson's legs, holding them immovable, and pulled. Carson's back bent like a U against the stanchion. He struggled, eyes wild above the gag. Inexorably Bellow Bill bent him back another inch.

"I'm going to snap your back . . . girl-killer," he purred. "Feel it? Hear your bones creak . . ."

At the last instant Bill relaxed the pressure. With his free hand he snatched off the gag.

"Talk!" he growled.

Carson couldn't talk. His mouth made vague movements and uttered incoherent sounds. Then the words came, faintly:

"Didn't see him . . . Didn't know . . .

"Tougher than I figured you were," Bill rumbled. His grip tightened on the limp body.

"Damned gorilla! Go to hell!" It was a gasp—feeble, tortured, but defiant. Could a man who was a rat take it? Doubt nagged Bellow Bill—but implacably he twisted Carson's back over the stanchion.

"Well?" he growled.

"Knew you'd see that book and think so," Carson gasped. "Didn't know—Dolin followed. Did see him—here—tonight—for first time—in years. Never told him—anything."

"How'd you come to have that book? Why didn't you admit you knew Dolin?"

Pain racked Carson's face. Bill eased off the pressure—a little.

"Couldn't. You and that Englishman would have kept me at Moluna. I'm class of '36—college, if you understand that, you big ape!" Fury was in that racked, gasping voice. "Dolin was '34. Two years ahead of me. Taking the same engineering course. I bought his books because they were cheaper."

"You knew him, though!" Bill rumbled. He was merely holding Carson against the stanchion now. The certainty that he had made a ghastly blunder hammered at him. He'd dealt with tricky and desperate beachcombers on the make too long, and too often. Carson was just a new-chum . . .

"I met him." Carson was helpless as a child, but in his eyes gleamed undying hate. "God, I met a thousand men! He's the son of a prof in another university, and that's all I know about him. I never knew he was following us. Never knew he'd left the States until tonight. Take it or leave it, you—you punk!"

BELLOW BILL swung Carson away from the stanchion. The new-chum instantly collapsed onto the deck. The pearler scowled down at him, so intent that only the sudden red flare in the eyes of the younger man warned him. At that instant a pistol was jammed against his back. Bill didn't move. That saved his life. He could feel the cold muzzle against his spine shaking because of the fury of the person who held it.

"Has he—has he hurt you much, Paul?" Susan raged.

"Hold it! Yes. And I'll settle that with the tattooed punk," Carson gasped. "Tell him where I bought my books, damn him!"

"At the second hand store—"

"Hear that?"

"Aye," Bill rumbled. Not a muscle moved.

He didn't blame these kids. He had lived too long among treacherous savages. Gotten too used to acting first.

"Was he trying to kill you, Paul? I heard you cry out, and then when I came on deck there was no one at the wheel."

"Leave that to me, Sue. Was there a Professor Dolin around when your father gave his lecture? He showed them the gold

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dust in that coral borings. *They* talked."

"I don't know, Paul."

"That'll be it, though. Give me that gun."

He took the pistol. Bellow Bill met his eyes over the barrel, which was aimed at the tattooed ship in the center of the broad chest.

The kid wanted to shoot. But he'd never killed a man. That isn't easy, the first time, in cold blood.

Carson's eyes fell. "I can't sail a schooner, Sue," he temporized. "Norman-Pierce said he was honest, but—you're a damned stupid brute!"

"Aye," Bellow Bill agreed.

"Get out of here! From now on you take my orders. *We* don't know anything about you. By God, I'd like to kill you."

"Sure," Bellow Bill rumbled. "I was wrong. I'm sorry. But in the South Seas a man has got to be sudden. We're gambling four lives against five million dollars."

"So what?"

"In the South Seas a life ain't worth much. That's all. It's a double cross we've got to worry about, not Dolin. He's somewhere in the brush at Moluna, nursing a crippled foot."

He had the new-chum there. The red eyes shifted.

"You'd like the five million," Carson snapped.

"Sure. Figure it out, kid, while we're sailing to Lieuana. Figure this, too: can you get that gold out of eighteen feet of water alone? Can you keep a bunch of black cannibals from rushing you while *they* do it? Salt-water blacks know what gold's worth. And there's a few white men on every island."

"I can look after myself. Get on deck!" Carson ordered hoarsely.

Bellow Bill turned on his heel, caught the hatch coaming, and was out of the fo'csle in one lithe upward leap . . . An impractical scholar, a girl, and a stubborn, over-confident new-chum who itched to shoot him. Bad, rotten bad . . . and it was the biggest stake he'd ever played for.

The vast, tattooed shoulders shrugged.

"Wish I was alone, though," Bellow Bill rumbled to the blue-black sea.

CHAPTER IV.

HANGMAN'S KNOT.

IT is an unusual man who can forego the pleasure of explaining and apologizing for his own mistakes. Bill possessed that gift. He had blundered. With good reasons. But to hell with the reasons. What remained was the fact, and the consequences. He admitted the fact; he calculated the consequences, and everything else he forgot.

Throughout the long sail to Lieuana no word was addressed to him save in command. Invariably his answer was, "Aye, aye—sir." With a dead pan, and eyes in which the twinkle was so deeply buried that it was invisible. Griswold and Carson and Susan sat around the deck, mostly in a silence that gradually became embittered. Bellow Bill sat at the wheel and chewed fine-cut, calmly; and spat imperturbably to leeward. Let 'em give orders while there wasn't a stranger in sight. The time would come when they wouldn't know what to do.

It came, with emphasis, when the schooner raised Paleu, the island in the Lieuana group within the lagoon of which the gold lay covered with coral. Sailing directly to Paleu, instead of the larger island where the godowns of Vansteen the trader were located, was Griswold's order. It was good sense. But Griswold had explained that Paleu was a very small circular atoll, with only a shallow break in the reef. Except when copra was to be collected, it was so small that no natives lived there. This wasn't the season when coconuts were ripe. Therefore Paleu would be uninhabited.

It wasn't. Not by a good fifty lean, black, hard-muscled young savages it wasn't. They eased out of the dense underbrush that grew to the edge of the beach as Bill dropped anchor. They carried ten-foot, slender spears. Fishing spears, as Bill knew. But he couldn't see any fish, and a

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fishing spear in the hands of a husky savage is just as nasty as a pitchfork to meet end-on.

There wasn't a woman or a child in sight. Bill wondered if Griswold and Carson would realize that that meant trouble. The men seemed to range in age from sixteen to about twenty. Bill couldn't figure what that meant himself. The bachelor's club house and the young unmarried male are the two most important social fixtures in any South Seas community, but bachelors usually hang around near the women, in the South Seas as elsewhere.

To the age of that group there was one exception—a scarred, greasily fat, middle-aged native who was obviously a devil-devil doctor, and who hailed them in English:

"Ahoy! We fella belong good black fella, my word, yes! You land pretty quick too much!"

"He seems a trifle eager to get us ashore. As if he were waiting for us," Professor Griswold chattered. "Better not show any suspicion, I suppose—"

HE glanced at Carson, who was fingering a gun, and at Bill. Bill crammed a fistful of fine-cut into his mouth.

"There's too damn many of them," Carson growled. He looked at Bill. He was young, and his girl was watching him. He hated to admit he didn't know what to do. Bellow Bill shifted his quid, and saved Carson's face.

"The custom is to invite the chief aboard," he rumbled. "The chief *only*. Give the witch doctor three sticks of trade tobacco."

"Suppose they all come?"

"Then the custom is to start shooting when they shove off, and toss a stick of dynamite into the canoes when they come alongside," remarked Bill conversationally. "Men get *kai-kaied* in these waters for errors of etiquette—or judgment. Knowin' the etiquette, they *won't* all shove off together."

"Then tell that fat chief to come aboard," Carson ordered sullenly.

"Aye, aye," Bill rumbled. The "sir" was omitted, but he kept a perfectly dead pan. They didn't trust him. That was just a fact, to be taken into account. He rose, and gave the invitation to come aboard in a bellow that made the group of blacks jump, so that the long spears stirred like a nest of snakes.

"Can you slip an anchor cable, Carson?" he muttered as a dugout bearing the witch doctor put out from the beach. It was about a hundred and fifty yards away. Easy rifle shot.

"Yes. Why?"

"Because I'll have to go ashore, later. A return call, savvy?" Bill muttered. "In case of doubt kick the compressor off, and let the chain run. The bitter end isn't shackled."

Carson didn't know that the bitter end was simply the end of the anchor chain. *He'd* never anchored off a lee shore in a gale and paid out chain fathom by fathom to keep the anchor from dragging, until the bitter end was reached, and nothing remained for a sailor to do. Carson didn't know too many things. No time to tell him. The dugout was alongside, and the witch doctor was climbing aboard.

"You trader fella stop along here today. No stop along here tomorrow, my word, no," he announced authoritatively. "Big feast tomorrow. Plenty young Marys walk about too much. Take husbands, my word yes. You go along Lieuana belong trade. This island tabu. My word, yes!"

"What's all that mean?" Carson grumbled.

"Some kind of annual marriage festival—if it ain't a stall," Bellow Bill rumbled quickly, under his breath. "A witch doctor can make an island tabu for a year, if he likes."

Bill didn't like the greasy native. There was a leer in the bloodshot eyes, an impudence far greater than normal . . . If Paleu was tabu, the party would be driven to Vansteen, the trader at Lieuana.

"What name belong you?" Bill boomed.

"Nauma name belong me."

"What young Marys walk about?"

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"Young Marys never know man fella walk about."

Bellow Bill's eyes narrowed. A parade of virgins, scheduled for the morrow. Hence all the young and marriageable young men were on Paleu. An explosive situation, even if the witch doctor was telling the truth. Which he probably wasn't, completely, since witch doctors as a class are sinister and congenital liars.

"Give him three sticks of trade tobacco," Bill ordered Carson curtly, and went below.

IN the cabin the pearler picked a Winchester from the rack and made sure the magazine was full. He stuck a twelve-inch diver's knife in his belt, scowled for a moment, and then, from a secret hiding place in a deck beam, reached down a chamois bag of pearls—the cream of a season's fishing. Witch doctors are the racketeers of the South Seas, and pearls are cash. . . . A bribe alone, however, might not work. Bellow Bill thought fast, and picked up a ten foot length of hard-braided fish line.

He was grinning when he returned to the deck and squatted in front of Nauma. His big, tattooed fingers began to tie a hangman's noose in the end of the fish line. Bloodshot eyes watched him uneasily.

"Plenty fella pearls belong you—no tabu belong here," Bill rumbled. "You make young Mary walk about next week? My word, yes!"

He opened the chamois bag to reveal the pearls, and suddenly tossed it against the dirty legs of the witch doctor. Nauma snatched at the bag. As he bent forward Bill slipped the noose around his throat, drawing the hangman's knot snugly against the brown Adam's apple. It was swiftly done. Nauma made an involuntary effort to leap up, but Bill's hands on his throat repressed the movement—which would have buried the thin cord deep in the fat of his throat and garroted the native before his fumbling fingers could have found the knot.

Nauma realized that. He stared wild-eyed in Bill's grim face.

"You good fella," the pearler purred. "You move slow now. My word, yes. You tell black fellas one big tabu on Paleu. No black fella walk about. No black Mary walk about. Not this week."

Nauma got the idea. He clutched the pearls more tightly, but sweat squeezed out of his greasy skin in big drops. One hard pull on the fish line would finish him.

He nodded.

"But—you've lost his friendship. It's treachery! The blacks will hate us!" Professor Griswold bleated. Carson scowled, and Susan, quicker-witted, stared at Bellow Bill with a mixture of admiration and distrust.

"Friendship? We never had it. Fear is all these devils ever understand," Bill rumbled. "I know what I'm doing." He flashed a smile. "'Cast not your pearls before swine,'" he quoted.

"But it's an unprovoked assault!" Griswold chattered.

"Sure," Bill agreed. "You're here to loot this guy's patrimony, ain't you? And his great-great-grandpappies got the gold by killing and eating a shipload of sailors. It's a rough business all round."

He rose, and at the light pull on the cord Nauma rose too, and stood trembling. His face was the grayish-green of a black in abject terror. Sweat runneled down the tribal scars that ridged his forehead and chest.

"But why must you go ashore?" Susan asked.

"To show them I ain't afraid of the whole gang, and to show you that I'm on the up-and-up," Bellow Bill answered frankly. "You aren't sure of me up to now, and I don't blame you. I'll show you a good job of handling natives—and I'll do it in the open on that beach, where you can watch every move and hear every word. But remember about that cable, Carson."

BELLOW BILL wrapped the cord around his left hand, and dropped the Winchester into the crook of his left arm. The standard tactics in dealing with natives—worked out by the blackbirders who used to land on lonely beaches

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to persuade a mob of murderous cannibals to sell themselves into slavery—is for one boat to go ashore with an unarmed crew. Unarmed because savages have rushed a boat for a gun. A second boat, or the crew of the schooner, covers the first boat with rifles.

That way savages gain nothing by a rush. They only make themselves targets. Bill couldn't use this scheme, for he trusted neither the marksmanship nor the judgment of Carson and the Griswolds. Nevertheless the noose around Nauma's neck reproduced the essential point of blackbirder tactics; a rush would be the witch doctor's finish, and would not endanger the schooner. Bellow Bill figured that he had hit upon a pretty smart scheme, under the circumstances.

The young natives came to their feet as he paddled toward the beach. He motioned them to stand aside. Nauma called out the same order, hoarsely, and it was obeyed. The long spears swayed as the crowd divided into two groups about fifty yards apart—theoretically, but not actually, beyond earshot of the coming palaver. Savage etiquette is strict, but savages possess an entirely human and civilized amount of curiosity. The tide was low, so that the beach was about forty feet wide—white sand glaring in the late afternoon sun, sloping toward underbrush that looked solid as a green wall. As Bellow Bill and Nauma stepped from the dugout they were as exposed as two flies on a white wall.

"Steady, fella! Fright along you too much," the pearler soothed.

Terror was making Nauma's legs incapable of bearing his fat body. Animal noises gurgled in his throat. He plucked vainly at the thin cord, trying to slip a finger beneath it. The beauty of a hangman's knot is that it will tighten, but never loosen. Bill had utilized it before.

"Tell them," he muttered with grim humor, "that a big devil has put a tabu on Paleu. Tell them they must go back to Lieuana and hold the marriage parade there." The big voice boomed out. "What the devil's the fright along you?"

For Nauma was in such a state that he couldn't have uttered a coherent word to save his life. He slumped against Bill's chest, making slavering, gasping sounds. Wild eyes stared across the beach.

Bill pushed him away and stepped from behind him, striding onward so that Nauma must also walk ahead, or strangle. To the pearler such abject fear was incomprehensible. And would have remained so, permanently, except for the sun, dipping toward the sea at Bill's back. Those fierce, level rays were reflected with a gleam, even by blued steel.

Otherwise Bellow Bill would never have seen the tip of a rifle poking slowly through the densest of tropical thickets. There was nowhere to run. There was but one outcome possible to a duel between a rifleman in a thicket and a six-foot, three-inch pearler out on the open sand. Bill had a flash of bitter sympathy for Nauma—who'd paddled out to lure him into an ambush, only to be forced to accompany him with a garrote around his neck.

The rifle barrel steadied in line for Bill's forehead.

CHAPTER V.

TWO-LEGGED FISH.

EVERY muscle hardened to meet the shock of a slug. To the eye that looked over the rifle sights Bellow Bill's movements must have been disconcertingly swift, but to Bill they were slow. Every watch-tick was an eon. He dropped flat on his face. Sand filled his mouth and nose.

He pulled on the cord—pulled hard enough to jerk the staggering witch doctor off balance, to drop him, with eyeballs starting from their sockets and wide open mouth that would never breathe air again, flat on Bill's back. A huge, tattooed arm that was tensed against the impact of a slug that did not come reached backward and wrapped around Nauma's neck.

An eternal second—then, with a leap, Bill was on his feet, Nauma's black body

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pinwheeling over his shoulder to be clasped in huge arms and hugged to his chest. Behind that shield of flesh that was dying or dead Bill rushed at the rifle. He didn't look. He was trying to shrink his own body behind that of a smaller man.

It was all so quick that Susan's scream of alarm still rang in the air. Not one of the natives of either side was up. Yet Bill was conscious only that the soft sand was slowing down his rush. Why—why didn't the rifle blaze. Why didn't the guy shoot?

Bill crashed into underbrush that was like a wall. He hurled Nauma aside, snapped his own rifle to his hip. There was nothing to shoot at. The branches through which he had burst snapped back across his face. He dove for the base of the nearest palm tree, squirmed belly down behind the spreading root. He wasn't—couldn't be—five yards from the point from which that rifle barrel had been thrust. Had the guy gotten buck fever? That was possible.

The damned undergrowth was like a green blindfold. He couldn't see farther than the end of his gun. The natives were yelling, starting to rush him. They knew he'd killed the witch doctor. They'd get him for that. They'd be on him, twenty together, in a dozen seconds. But right now there wasn't a sound, not the stir of a leaf in the undergrowth around him.

Bill squirmed forward. He could stalk as well as any man. He'd shoot this out—

A rifle cracked, once. He didn't see the flash. No bullet came tearing through the leaves. Out on the water Susan screamed piercingly:

"Bill!"

"Ahoy!" he thundered his war-cry in answer, and fired at random in the direction of the shot. There was a stir in the bush—a noise suddenly multiplied twenty-fold to right and left as the natives plunged into the undergrowth like a cavalry charge.

HE fired. That shot hit, for a native screamed. That would slow them up. Bill turned and plunged through the thicket like a bull, trusting to the noise behind him to cover the noise he made, and to his greater strength to make the faster time through vines that tightened across legs and chest and had to be snapped, through huge serrated leaves that ripped at his clothes and slapped him damply across the face.

He was panting, sweating, desperate. They were on his heels, and if they got him he would go down under a black, squirming mass and never get up. He ran blindly as a charging bull, but not as a bull runs, in a straight line. He kept his head. . . . Two new-chums and a girl, on a schooner that would be rushed. *They* didn't know how to use dynamite, and it takes dynamite to halt a crowd of blacks that swim like sharks, that come tumbling over the rail on the port side while you are putting a bullet through a kinky head that is swimming toward you from the starboard.

Bill had to get back. So he circled, even though that meant skirting the front of the mob that was crashing behind him. They were getting braver with every foot he ran. He knew that by the deeper-throated, snarling yells. The underbrush thinned out. They saw him, and yelped like hounds that are closing him. But his circle was completed, and his face again toward the sea. He kept ahead, smashing, whirling, twisting; beating a path with the butt of the rifle, slashing with his knife when a vine caught him that was too thick to break.

A native that followed the trail he broke could have caught him. And caught a bullet or a foot of steel. They knew that. They kept in groups—four or five men together, but as the chase turned back toward the sea those who had lagged behind now tried to cut him off. They had as far to go as he. He kept his lead, hacked through a thickening mass of undergrowth, and burst out on the beach.

A spear flashed by him as he bounded across the sand, but only a few natives had stayed by the water, and they were clustered near the spot where he had disappeared, almost beyond spear-throw. He fired, with one hand, swinging the rifle like

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a pistol. He missed, but his targets ducked for cover, and with a booming yell he plunged into the sea and swam like an otter for the schooner.

The rifle was useless once the barrel filled with water. He dropped it. Carson, the damned fool, hadn't slipped the chain yet. His head and the muzzle of his gun were visible behind the rail of the fo'csle. Trying to stand off forty blacks, like a hero, instead of obeying orders. Bill cursed him—and cursed again as the natives seized their opportunity.

Five blacks rushed for the dugout, sprinted with it until they were waist deep, and sprang aboard. As one they seized paddles and the dugout jumped ahead under the push of the spade-shaped blades. Bellow Bill could swim. Few men faster. But he wasn't going to beat that dugout to the schooner. And Carson—with some damn fool notion of holding his fire till he could see the whites of their eyes, probably—was covering the dugout instead of slinging lead as fast as he could pump a Winchester.

The anchor chain did let go with a rattle and roar. Susan, likely, or the professor. The cooler heads. But the dugout was angling toward Bill, determined to cut off the helpless swimmer before they tried conclusions with the schooner. The bow paddler was standing up, spear poised.

BELLOW BILL stopped swimming. Head and shoulders out of water, he filled his lungs to their utmost capacity, taking the quick, deep breaths of a pearl diver before the plunge. He gripped his knife. The dugout was between him and the schooner. That was why Carson still didn't fire . . . afraid he'd hit Bill. That was a grim joke—and like a new-chum. All theory. . . . The dugout came on, faster; the paddler yelling with every stroke. They thought the tattooed white man had given up. They knew they had him. Bill gripped his knife, and measured the speed of the boat with the care of a matador who stands in the path of a charging bull, aware that the least miscalculation will spell life or death. He waited, coolly treading water—and suddenly, with a flash of feet, dove straight down. Deep. Deep enough to get beyond the thrust of a ten-foot spear, counting seconds, turning at the bottom of the dive and letting the air in his lungs lift him. Sunset filled the water with yellowish light. He waited till he glimpsed the black shadow of the boat racing toward him and swam upward—not to intercept the boat, but to meet the slim black shadow of the outrigger that raced parallel with the larger shadow.

The natives saw him rising, but his timing was perfect. As he rose the outrigger was between him and the harpooner, spoiling a good shot. The black waited for Bill's head and throat to break the surface—but Bill's head never did emerge! Only his hands—one tattooed paw that gripped the outrigger, one fist gripping a foot of steel ground to a razor edge which slashed at the cords of coconut fiber that bound the float to the poles of the outrigger.

A spear gashed Bill's thigh. A second flew above him as he severed the forward lashing, let go so that that dugout forged ahead, and cut the after lashing. The dugout capsized as the outrigger floated clear and five blacks were struggling in the water, with ten-foot spears and wooden paddles that were too long and awkward to fight with. Bill dove in with his knife. He drove it into one leg to pay for the wound he had taken himself. He could have disemboweled the savage as easily, but that would have been wanton murder. The cry of pain the man uttered was enough.

Spears and paddles floated free as five blacks swam for the beach—each expecting Bill's knife in his back at every stroke. Bellow Bill was swimming just as hard in the opposite direction, keeping under water except when he had to rise to snatch air. That sniper ashore must be waiting now for another perfect shot—even if he was as slow on the trigger, almost, as Carson.

Bill swam until he was in the shadow of the schooner's stern, shielded from the beach by the hull, and rose with a loud "Whoosh!" of pent-up breath and relief.

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He felt he'd done damn well for a man without a partner. The whole thing had taken how long? Less than five minutes, likely. He swam for the schooner's taffrail, easily, a broad grin on his big face.

Susan was aft, crouching close to the deck with a Winchester. She was staring at him with eyes as big as saucers. Bill didn't wonder. He rated it. Carson appeared beside her. The new-chum stared. His teeth bared in a murderous grimace. He snapped his gun to his shoulder and fired.

The bullet burned red-hot across Bill's side. Carson levered in another cartridge, grinning with a joy in the kill that was devilish.

The water closed over Bill's head.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TATTOOED SNAKE.

INSTINCT made Bellow Bill duck. He was under water before he knew he had moved hand or foot. His only thought was of the malevolent delight stamped on Carson's face. The kid had wanted to kill him—and might have done it. The first shock of the bullet kept Bill from knowing how badly he was hurt. His hands groped along the slimy hull of the schooner, and closed on the rudder. The salt water smarted in the wound. The pain was a good sign. He wouldn't feel that if he had been hit hard.

Gently he let himself rise, hidden by the overhang of the stern. Carson had shot at him as though he were a mad dog. Because of the breathless hurly-burly of the past five minutes Bellow Bill couldn't figure why, but he was aware that Carson would shoot again.

The pearler made no sound. He braced one foot against the rudder and waited, while the water around him slowly tinted with red. Carson would lean over the taffrail to watch the body of the man he had shot sinking slowly through the water. A killer could never restrain curiosity; the trick had never failed.

And did not. Carson's head came into view. Bellow Bill lunged upward, gripped him by the slack of the shirt, and pulled him over the rail so suddenly that the rifle flew from the new-chum's grip. The water would have made it useless anyhow, and once in the sea the young man was easy to handle. Bill choked him, gripped him in one arm so that the point of the knife was under Carson's chin, and thrust himself backward from beneath the overhanging stern.

The movement made him look upward into the muzzle of Susan's gun. Bill grinned. He was on his back, half submerged, with Carson clasped to his chest. The least movement of the knife would cut Carson's throat.

"Chuck that gun overboard, sister," Bill growled.

She hesitated. Hatred made her face dead-white and rigid as a tortured mask. Her neck knotted as she swallowed the lump in her throat. Then, with a shrug, she dropped the rifle into the sea.

He was careful that the knife menaced Carson while he lifted him over the taffrail. To swing two men from the water with one arm hardly taxed Bill's strength. A glance showed the beach black with natives, but the loss of the dugout had dampened their fury, and the schooner was drifting slowly away.

"Well?" Bill rumbled.

Susan's mouth twisted with bitter loathing.

"You win. As you said, life is cheap," she answered. She turned, rigidly, and pointed to the foredeck. Bill had to step aside to see Professor Griswold, partially sheltered behind the main mast. He was flat on his back, and the front of his shirt was red.

"Your shot went through his lung," she said. "Though he isn't dead—yet."

"My shot?"

SUSAN'S reserve broke. Her face flamed. "Yours, damn your rotten soul!" she shrilled. "I saw your tattooed forearms when you fired from the

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bush. For God's sake, don't try to lie. That's almost worse than—than murder. You killed that poor black just—just to fool us, I guess. God knows why—why didn't you kill us decently? You could have! Were you too slimy-crooked to face us, or does it amuse you to play with us like a cat with a mouse?"

"My forearms? But that wasn't me. There was someone in the bush—"

"Dolin, I suppose? Painted up like you? Dolin, that's left behind us at Moluna. I saw *you*, you tattooed murderer! Kill us—steal our gold!"

It was hysterics, and it was madness—and it was a fact, too. Her father lay with a bullet through his lungs, and Bill's knife was pricking the throat of her fiancé. In that second of silence Bellow Bill cursed the cold and calculating trickery of Dolin—and wondered how he had got to Lieuana first. It had taken guts to roll aside in the brush and shoot at Griswold, with confidence that Bill could be killed later.

Bill gripped Carson more firmly, and crouched—behind the schooner's rail.

"Did you hear those blacks yelling?" he asked slowly.

"Yes, I heard them!"

"And you saw me wreck that dugout—and think that was a stall?"

"Yes!"

"Then . . . then—okay," Bill rumbled. He was grim. He could talk himself blue in the face and get nowhere. He made his decision. "Have it your own way," he said. He reached out, cut a length of rope from the main sheet, bound Carson's hands behind his back, and flung him to the deck.

"Turn around," he growled to the girl, and bound her, too. Not roughly, but firmly enough to hold. He pushed her down until she was sitting on the deck.

"What are you doing—now?" she panted.

"I'm bleeding, sister," Bill told her. He trimmed the sail and put the wheel in the becket, so that the schooner stood away from the island, gaining speed as the wind filled the sail. The sun dipped under the horizon, and darkness reached like a black hand across the sea. Bill went below and got bandages, but it was to Professor Griswold that he went first.

There was bloody froth on his lips, but the bullet had only touched the lung. It had drilled clean through the lean body. A clean wound. Bill put on a compress, moving the professor as little as possible. He would live, with luck. The best surgeon could have done little more for him, under the circumstances. Susan and Carson had squirmed to the rail where they could lift themselves, and were watching him.

"What are you doing?" the girl called.

"You believe your eyes, sister. Use them," he growled.

BILL bound his own wounds, using tape to make the bandages firm and water tight. He was creased across the ribs. The wound had begun to hurt like hell, and he had lost a lot of blood. But it wasn't bad enough to stop him. He went below and brought up a box of dynamite. He lashed the sticks to a lead line, two feet apart, using instant fuse. Twenty-five sticks. At the end, another lead weight, and a long length of slow-burning miner's fuse. He inserted a cap where the fuses joined, and bound the joint carefully with tape.

Susan and Carson watched every move. He let them wonder. He did not say a word. His lips were set. He hated them—as badly as they hated him. He put the schooner about so that it headed toward Paleu, and as the boom swung across the deck he hooked a lantern in it. They would be puzzled to know what that was for—and so would forty-odd black men, and one white one, watching him from the island.

"To save time," Bill rumbled, "you might tell me whereabouts in the lagoon that cone-shaped mound of coral that covers the gold is. I can find it, of course. Or make you talk."

They could understand that. To make new-chums believe a lie was always easier than to convince them of the truth. In a

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dull and despairing monotone Susan informed him that the coral mound was in the southwest quarter of the lagoon.

Bill grunted. Would they believe, for example, that to sail the schooner through a tortuous channel in an unbuoyed reef was the trickiest and most dangerous operation that confronted him. No. And yet his big shoulders hunched as he came within rifle shot of the island. The rail protected him from a bullet, and yet he should have been forward with the light, conning the schooner with his voice. To work without a partner was hard.

As the water shoaled the lantern light was reflected from the light-colored coral on the bottom where the depth was not more than a fathom or two. Reefs were revealed as gray shadows against black, and by the depths alongside he had to guess at the coral formations ahead. If he went aground he'd be sunk, burned, and eaten. His lips twitched. They'd wonder what he was grinning at. Yet it was a grim joke that he had decided upon. To work a double cross, with reverse English. To enlist a formidable ally, though the hand of every man was against him.

Twenty years of South Seas experience were drawn upon as the schooner tacked through that crooked channel. Bellow Bill handled the wheel with a mastery that made the passage seem easy. On the inner beach a fire was burning, but there was neither a shout nor a shot. Forty-odd savages and a single white man, watching a lantern move slowly toward the southwest quarter of the lagoon. A circle of light on water that was faintly phosphorescent, a dark hull, a sail partly lighted, partly shadowy.

"About here, sister?" Bill rumbled.

"Yes, about." She was nervous.

He saw the cone-shaped peak as she spoke. To find it so soon was luck, though he would have tacked until dawn if necessary. He slipped the wheel in the becket, and lit the fuse. The lead line with its dynamite beads flew through the air, falling beyond the mound. Bill paid out the line, slowly, as the schooner forged ahead. He flipped the fuse into the water and took the wheel, sailing straight onward. Thirty seconds passed. . . . A minute. . . .

THE explosion was like a thunderclap—one ear-splitting boom, echoed from ashore by amazed yells. A sheet of water leaped high, and fell in a gleaming, ghostly shower of phosphorescence. The radiance seemed to boil and spread in a widening circle. Ashore the savages were silent, surprised to find themselves unharmed after that blast. The lantern gave just enough light to gleam on the eyeballs of Carson and the girl.

Bill put the helm down, and sent the schooner back through the center of the white, shimmering pool. All three craned their necks.

"By God, gold! Damn you, I can *see* it!" Carson snarled.

"Aye. Dynamite exploded that way will dig a trench as neat as a hundred men with shovels. I've opened up a golden oyster, eh? Coral for shell, and gold for meat. Rich pickings."

He sailed on for the passage through the reef.

"You grinning, tattooed ape—" Carson began.

"Yeah," Bellow Bill agreed. "It's plenty funny from where I sit." He was thinking of Dolin. One white man, ashore. "Look aft. What do you see?"

"By the phosphorescence about a dozen men are swimming out."

"There'll be forty or more swimming out in five minutes," Bill prophesied. "Salt water savages know what gold is worth. Bush savages wouldn't, now. Those blacks are swimming out to find what all the noise was about."

Bill stepped abruptly, for the schooner was in the channel. When the schooner was again in the open sea he set a new course, and put the wheel in the becket. In the steady trade wind the boat would sail herself for miles, nearly as straight as though a hand were on the helm. Bill's voice hardened.

"Your old man will live if he gets careful nursing. Otherwise not," he told Susan.

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"So you've got to go to Lieuana. Sail the course I've set, and run the schooner on the beach if you can't stop it any other way. Slip a blanket under the professor, carry him ashore, and get some old grandmother to fan away the flies. A grandmother or an old man is all you'll be able to get."

"But—" Susan interrupted.

"But nothing!" the pearler boomed. "When a village has a marriage ceremony once a year, nothing but a witch doctor and fear of his devils can keep the Marys and the bucks apart when the day comes. Nauma's dead, so all of Lieuana will be here tomorrow—for a *golden* wedding." In the faint light of the lantern on the boom Bellow Bill's lips twitched. "Vansteen must be there. A smart, tricky trader Vansteen must be. Well—trade with him. A share of the gold for his help, eh? And if you lie back to back those ropes won't be too hard to untie."

Susan leaned forward. "What do you gain by sending us off?" she asked. "I can't believe you didn't shoot—and yet—no, you're not afraid, either. . . . It's some scheme. . . . What shall I tell Vansteen?"

"Anything you like," Bill boomed. "What you saw, what you thought you saw, or any lie you can cook up. When he sees my schooner, without me, he'll come like seven bells whatever you saw. Lieuana is five miles wide, and less than ten miles away. Even new-chums can't miss that—and if you *don't* go there your father will die. So don't try to be smart."

Bill tightened his knife in the sheath, and vaulted over the taffrail into the sea.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GOLDEN OYSTER.

HIS wounds bothered him. He swam slowly. He alone, of all the people on the islands, had time to spare. Ten or eleven hours intervened till dawn. A desperate enterprise confronted him but he was heartened by the fact that his situation was no worse than the three-fold dilemma into which he had plunged others by the blast that opened the golden oyster. If he was alone and handicapped he had dragged the rest into the same pit.

With the warm sea buoying him up, paddling along on his back, his anger at Carson and Susan changed to sympathy. It was a tough traverse he had made them steer. But Vansteen . . . who must have helped Dolin from the first, or Dolin would never have beaten him to Paleu, and been waiting with the fighting men of the island. . . . Bill had never seen Vansteen's face, but he would like to see it when the trader became aware that someone had shot Griswold, that Bill himself was at large, and Dolin unaccounted for.

Come to Paleu the trader must. The marriage festival and the treasure both compelled it; but miles away, with only Carson's perplexing story—or lies—to guide him, Vansteen must guess who had fired that shot, what had happened in that chase through the brush, and what was to happen during the coming night. Vansteen could be sure of just one thing: if he guessed wrong, or if he blundered when he arrived at Paleu at dawn, he would be on a spot.

And Dolin? Bellow Bill had a grim account to settle with that big blond youngster. Dolin was too cold-bloodedly smart and tricky. But Dolin was already in a predicament that would turn the hair of the most experienced old-timer gray. Already faint echoes of the shrieking pandemonium in the lagoon were drifted out to sea. Wildly excited natives can no more be silent than a pack of dogs. Dolin would be fingering a rifle, counting seven cartridges in the magazine, trying to watch forty-odd gold-crazed savages with one pair of eyes. Dolin would be sweating blood already. Let him sweat!

Bellow Bill walked out on the beach. He found and cut a length of thin and flexible vine, as strong as linen thread. Dolin hadn't fired, yet. Stout lad, Dolin. The shouting of the blacks had changed to a succession of short, high-pitched yelps.

"Aie!" Another voice. "Aie. . . . Aie!"

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Expletives torn from corded, straining chests by ungovernable excitement.

Bellow Bill squirmed into the underbrush and worked his way across the atoll, calmly and noiselessly, until he could peer through the brush onto the inner lagoon. He could have made more noise than a cow, and no natives would have cared. Dolin wouldn't have dared to turn.

Against black water and the black mass of cocopalms, mad, purposeful activity was lighted by the silver flash of phosphorescence and the ruddy glare of a leaping bonfire. Through the water seemed to squirm two lines of huge black snakes, swimming out, ducking under, black body after black body outlined in pale silver fire, rising with a gasp, swimming back to rush up the beach—naked devils, black against the firelight, hugging ingots and bars to their chests. Naked devils, each of whom dropped the gold in a pile of its own, screamed, "Aie!" and turned to dash madly back into the water for more.

IN forty-odd places the flames gleamed dully on piles of golden bars. Piles that grew, like—like the piles of coconuts in a South Seas harvest, when a whole village goes into a grove, and each man gets as many as he can carry to his own pile. Dark fingers clawing for golden spoil only a few fathoms down, raking and reraking every inch of the shattered coral, each diver guided by flashing, silver gleams stirred by the man who preceded him. More than forty blacks were making short work, even of tons of gold. Each of those bars, Bill judged grimly, weighed a couple of *arrobas*—about fifty pounds. And yet there were bars enough, but the moment would come, soon, when a diver would return empty-handed. When a savage who had piled up two would glare at the neighbor who had amassed three. Already some of the divers were returning with handfuls of coin. . . .

And Dolin? He stood behind the fire, with his rifle across his arm. The light gleamed on the paint that still tattooed his forearms. He was standing like an overseer, but he had been cool and smart enough not to attempt to interfere.

"That's right! Pile it up!" he kept shouting. "Every guy in his own pile! The more you get the more I pay!"

Sweat was streaking down his face. He was telling the wind to blow, and he knew it. It was smart, to order them to do what they were going to do anyway. But—the fire, untended, was gradually dying down. The natives were too busy to bring fuel, and Dolin did not dare. Even his hollow claim to power was dying with the light. It would be dark soon, and he would be alone with forty-odd men who knew he would cheat them of their labors if he could. Once the gold was salvaged one idea would pop into forty kinky black heads: Kill the white man, and hide as much of this gold as I can where no one but myself can find it.

Dolin was smart and cool. He foresaw the inevitable. A sweat-streaked face kept turning right and left, seeking a refuge. In front, the water, behind, the jungle that would be full of men crawling toward him, jabbing into his hiding place with long spears, as soldiers jab bayonets into hay when they suspect an enemy is hidden beneath it.

He kept wiping his forehead and shaking the sweat from his fingers.

"That's right!" Pile it up, you guys! Every man for himself!" His voice was hoarser, more hollow, and as the bonfire died he backed toward the jungle, reluctantly, foot by foot, aware that nothing awaited him in the darkness but a delayed, and probably more painful death.

WHILE the search for the gold was still furious Bellow Bill squirmed through the undergrowth parallel to the shore. He had planned differently. He had prepared a doubled length of vine like a garroter's cord, but now he marked the tallest, thickest palm that grew near the fire. Dolin marked it too, by instinct; backed toward it.

As his shoulders touched the brush a huge, tattooed arm crooked around his

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throat. Bill's knife-point pricked his back. Dolin could not cry out. Beyond a single convulsive leap he hardly struggled. The rifle dropped from his hands as Bill drew him out of sight. A few blacks paused for an instant and plunged back into the lagoon for more gold. As Bill relaxed the pressure Dolin panted like an animal.

"They'll cook you and eat you if you make a sound," Bill growled in his ear. It wasn't a threat, but a plain statement of fact. The panting ceased. Bill reached out and secured the rifle.

"I can outrun and outswim these devils," he purred. "You say, 'Uncle,' or I'll heave you out on that beach—without a gun—for them to play with."

He felt Dolin shudder.

"Going to be a good boy?"

"For God's sake, lay off the razzberries!" came the desperate whisper.

"Okay. I'll give you a break," Bill purred. "Take off your shoes, and your pants." Dolin started. "Damn you, crawl over to the base of this palm and take off your shoes and pants," Bill repeated in a purring snarl. It was hard for him to whisper. "Quiet, if you don't want to be long-pig. . . . So. . . . That's better." The knife continued to prick Dolin's back. "Pass your pants around the trunk, and tie one leg to each wrist. They new?"

"Yes," Dolin breathed.

"Better hope they are. A new-chum's would be," Bill purred. "You've seen a lineman climb a telegraph pole? Well, that's the idea." He felt the knots on the pant legs, and pulled them tighter. "The idea is to lean way back. Coco bark is rough, and your bare feet will stick like a lineman's spurs. If you slip *I'll* knife you, and they'll find you hitched to the tree with your own pants. Get it? Okay—up with you!"

Bill climbed at Dolin's heels, but about ten feet up Dolin hesitated, leaned back, and whispered desperately:

"They'll see me! I'm getting above the underbrush!"

"Sure. I want them to see you," Bill growled. "Get this, buddy: when they see you, sing out that if any native leaves the beach the man next to him can have his pile. Then climb down where they can't see you—but keep above reach from the ground, or *I'll* cut you open. Get it?"

"Will—will that work?" Dolin whispered.

"Naw, it won't work. Savages ain't that simple," Bill purred with deep-chested contempt. "But you say that, and nothing more, or I'll settle with you. And you stick to your tree. They'll spear you if you go high, and I'll cut you if you come down. Get it?"

"And you said you'd give me a break," Dolin whispered. In that instant Bellow Bill almost admired him. Cold-blooded, but a fighter.

"*I* am," the pearler answered with menacing emphasis. Dolin went on up. Bill stopped when his head was above the screen of leaves. The embers of the fire still gave some light, but against the background of the palms the savages could not be sure that Dolin was not carrying a rifle. Anyway Bill hoped so.

A few natives had ceased to hunt treasure. These turned as Dolin shouted the order Bill had put in his mouth. His voice didn't quiver much, considering.

THE result, as Bill had anticipated, was to bring every man swimming in to protect his pile. For a little while they paused, the reddish light flickering over their black bodies. Then from savage to savage a low-toned whisper began to pass. The flaw in Dolin's tactics was obvious. South Seas natives are divided into clans. Bill, clinging to his observation post until the last second, could watch the clans organize. Men changed places. In a moment or two a long line became four loosely organized groups. Clan watched clan still, but half a dozen men snatched up spears and ducked into the bush. Bill could hear Dolin's sharp intake of breath.

"Stay up, lad. I'll take 'em," he whispered, and dropped noiselessly to the earth. At the base of the tree he caught up the rifle, and squirmed into the heart

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of a thicket. In a tight corner a man must have a partner, or make one. Dolin, in the tree, was an ally or a sacrificial goat. Which he was depended on whether or not he kept his mouth shut.

The natives closed in with a barely perceptible rustling of leaves. Close to the earth there was not a glimmer of light, but above, the thinner leaves let the firelight through even to reveal the blurred shape of a naked white body twelve feet from the ground. Bellow Bill didn't want Dolin speared. He was well back from the tree. By smell rather than sight—the smell of rancid coconut oil on crawling bodies—he judged when the natives were in position for a rush.

Into the darkness, low to the ground, he fired three shots as fast as he could pump the lever. Not to hit, but to make men startled by the noise leap to their feet. Into the midst of them he lunged, slashing right and left. A foot of razor-edged steel, and the butt of a gun, both backed with two hundred and forty pounds. Three shots, a yell and a scream—then the crash of four men running headlong for the beach, and behind them the horrible choked coughing of a man dying from a stomach wound. The gun butt had crashed against a head. Bellow Bill lifted the body by arm and leg, pushed forward, and slung it through the bush onto the sand. The dying man followed, to sprawl on his dead neighbor.

Dolin had dropped to the ground, and was tearing frantically at his wrist. Bill let him feel the knife-point.

"It's me," he purred—and covered Dolin's mouth with his hand.

"Tell them, 'Give the gold of the two fools I killed to the man on the right, and the man on the left,'" Bill whispered.

Gulping and faltering, Dolin obeyed.

"Talk up," Bill purred. "Now tell them, 'Each man sit down by his own gold.' . . . That's better."

"Will—will they do it?" Dolin whispered.

"Wouldn't you?" Bill purred. "Sure, they've made their play now."

He cut one of Dolin's wrists free, twisted his arms suddenly behind his back, and pushed him on his face, using the knife to make him lie still.

"Not a word till dawn," Bill warned. That was a long time off, and his wounded side hurt like hell. He could smell the blood of the man he had stabbed. He couldn't move. Less than thirty feet away a line of savages squatted, each by his little pile of gold, shivering, listening for the slightest sound. It would be weary waiting until dawn. It was, but the sky was barely gray when his schooner nosed through the channel into the lagoon.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MARRIAGE PARADE.

BY the sounds Bellow Bill kept track of Vansteen's approach. First an exclamation of one of the young men on the beach, then the creak of the boom as Vansteen tackled, then the gabble of natives' voices across the water—the voices of women and girls who gazed at such wedding preparations as they had never hoped to witness.

Their young men—not all of them—two stiff bodies on the beach here—but the others—young men they expected to marry with a few yards of calico, perhaps, if the young man were very wealthy, with the coveted bockis-with-bell—the box which rings when a thief opens it and which is, next to a phonograph, the chiefest of South Seas treasures—these young men rose to greet them, wan, sleepy-looking, with bodies scratched by the brush instead of oiled and painted—but with bars of gold at their feet.

Ten thousand parrots could not have equalled the noise made by the marriageable girls and their female relations. With one glance, marriage compacts that had taken years to arrange were upset. Overboard they went, mothers and girls, to touch the gold, to handle and smell, to claim a suitor or deny him.

Under cover of the shrieks Bellow Bill

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prodded Dolin close enough to the beach to see out beneath the thick bushes. Bill knelt on his back.

"One word out of you and you get it, savvy?" he rumbled, peering to locate Vansteen. The trader sailed the schooner directly to the shore, running the boat aground so that the bowsprit projected over the beach midway in that line of piled gold. Cautiously Vansteen moved forward.

By the round, shaved head and the flat, hard face Bellow Bill sized the trader up. No mercy there. Vansteen was flint. Carson stood beside him, pop-eyed. Susan wasn't to be seen. Undoubtedly she was taking care of her father. That pleased Bill.

"So? So?" Vansteen was saying to Carson. "I apologize, *meinheer!* It is truth you tell." His small eyes glinted up and down the beach, seeking signs of a white man, striving to guess which white man had killed the two bodies close at hand. Knife-thrust, and gun-butt blow. Farther up the beach, Nauma's strangled corpse. Vansteen wet his lips.

"You do not blame me?" he asked. He could not look away from the treasure. He hitched his gun belt forward; the fat face turned red and white, as though with fever.

"Damn screaming women!" he snarled. "This would be today, of all the year." He beckoned to a young man, and leaned over the rail as the black walked waist deep into the sea. Bellow Bill could not hear that low-voiced colloquy in native dialect, but the pantomime made him able to follow it. The native pointed at the bush and the bodies, drew his shoulders together like a man who shivers in the dawn, and then, in answer to a question, spoke one word that made Vansteen's head jerk up and his small eyes flash triumphantly.

"So!" he said.

"Bill killed them, eh? But where is he?" Carson asked.

"Bill? Yes, Bill. Of course," Vansteen answered—but absently. Ashore Dolin squirmed under Bill's weight. The pearler stilled him with a jab of the knife.

"Bill comes later," Vansteen was saying. "First . . . it is wrong that so much gold should belong to simple souls? Not so? Watch me then, *meinherr,* and learn trading." He filled his lungs.

"Pigs!" he roared, so that for an instant even the chattering women on the beach were silenced. In dialect he shouted, "Each man bring his gold aboard, and I will give him credit for its value in my books. Hurry, for it is time for the feast!"

MEN and women stared at him, sullenly; knowing they were cheated, but not understanding how. Gloomy looks, from beneath lowered brows. Credit they understood. He took their copra and shell in the season, and gave them goods through the year. This sounded the same, though they knew somehow that it was not. He waited, thick fist on hips, handy to his gun. He did it well, with sheer brazen effrontery. A native stooped and lifted three gold bars, walked toward the ship staggering beneath their weight. He was the first of a flock of sheep. Vansteen whipped a notebook from his pocket. In ten minutes it was all over.

The men remained in a compact group by the schooner. The women withdrew, farther up the beach.

"So!" said Vansteen explosively—though his eyes flicked uneasily toward the bush. "After work, play, eh, *meinherr?* You have not seen a South Seas marriage festival, no? It is worth seeing, even if you must come half around the world, but a man must sit with the other bachelors to see it." He laughed. "Where else do the prettiest girls of the village parade with only a necklace and a belt of beads before the eyes of their prospective husbands?"

Vansteen nudged Carson in the ribs. "I have a wife already, but you will jump down and sit with the others, eh?"

Carson jumped to the beach. Instantly two natives seized him by the elbows. He tried to throw them off, but a dozen hands fastened on him. On the fo'csle Vansteen grinned. "It is not good to give too much treasure to the simple," he leered. "You

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are a young fool, *meinherr,* and Bellow Bill is another, for he gave you his schooner instead of cutting your throats. Or perhaps he would not let you know that your bullet was mortal. That would be like him. A man, *meinherr,* too proud of his strength to admit he is dying—from the bullet of a fool! He never got back to this island."

Vansteen raised his voice. "You can come out now, Meinherr Dolin!" he shouted with grim joviality. "To stay hidden was well done! If you had shown yourself on the beach I would have had to kill this fool, and now you and I can trade with him—five million and immunity for us, against three lives, eh?"

The trader's lips smiled, but his eyes were slits and his face a flaming red. In the bush Bellow Bill cut the trousers that bound Dolin's hands.

"Go on—walk out," he purred. "He's your partner—but if you open your mouth before you are on the schooner I'll put a bullet through your back."

DOLIN rose stiffly. As he stepped forward, Bill picked up the gun. He covered, not Dolin, but Vansteen. The blond man was hardly out of the brush when Vansteen whipped out his revolver and fired. The bullet caught Dolin under the heart. He pitched forward, arms outflung. The paint on the forearms was vivid in the level rays of the rising sun. Red, and blue, and green, crudely imitating tattooing. In the cry that Carson uttered was as much surprise as horror—but the boom of the revolver was echoed by the crack of Bellow Bill's rifle. He aimed at Vansteen's treacherous heart, but he was not a good shot. He missed, a little. The bullet only drilled through Vansteen's lung, but it knocked him down, and Bellow Bill charged across the beach and swung aboard the schooner before he could rise.

Bill kicked the revolver away from a hand too weak to reach for it. The gray pallor of death was in the trader's fat face, for Bill's bullet had not missed the heart by two inches. Bubbles of blood broke on lips that tried to ask a question that was mirrored in eyes.

"How—how?" Vansteen was asking.

"I sank your dugout!" Bill thundered at the natives. "I killed your witch doctor. I knocked your heads together while that man"—a huge arm stabbed at Dolin—"hid in a tree. Do I come ashore with my knife, or do I pay you two years' wages for my gold that you brought ashore? Answer, you!"

The long arm swung at the blacks who held Carson. They couldn't answer. Not so quickly.

"Let go my friend and I not be cross along you!" Bellow Bill thundered in English.

They obeyed. He grinned at them, and at Carson, who stared at him as incredulously as any black, and began to stammer:

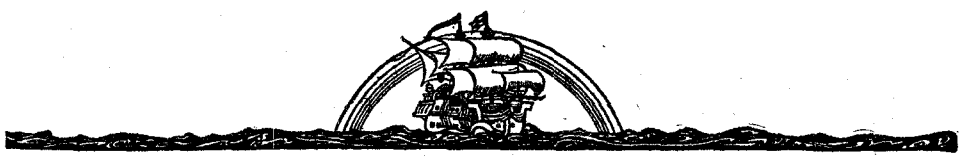
"But—but—"

"But nothing! Don't be a new-chum all your life," Bill boomed. "It's a fact, ain't it? I agreed to raise your gold for you and get it on my schooner, and I've done it. I let a pair of double crossers judge each other, and they did that, too. What chance did Dolin give the professor, or me?"

"But the gold!" Carson said.

"We'll let Norman-Pierce decide how we'll divide that when we get Susan and her father back to Moluna," Bill boomed. "Come aboard, lad, and watch the marriage parade. For if you think this will stop it you haven't even learned anything about the South Seas!"

THE END



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Wonders of the World

ON approaching the city of Rangoon in Burma, one cannot overlook the glittering dome of the golden Shwe Dagon, the most famous of all Buddhist shrines. Originally only 27 feet high, constant additions through the years have raised it to a height of 370 feet. After passing a group of smaller pagodas and shrines clustered around its base, one is greeted by a long flight of steps flanked by sculptured animals. This leads to an enormous platform, in the center of which sits a huge golden pagoda—the Shwe Dagon—its tip encrusted with jewels.

But the Shwe Dagon has more significance than just its burnished dome. This shrine provides a sanctuary for eight hairs from the head of Buddha. Now carefully guarded within the pagoda, they are supposed to have been presented to two kind merchants who made Buddha a gift of honey.

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War Declared!

The most terrible war machine in history strides across Europe, and no man can stop it

By THEODORE ROSCOE

A white dove fluttered down to Stehli's shoulder

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

IT was in July, 1936, that the dogs of war were unleashed in Europe, and hatreds that had simmered for two decades flared anew. The spark that ignited the conflagration was the double killing in the Teutonic capital of Baron Von Speer, Premier of Teutony, and Victor Gatreau, Foreign Minister of Esperance. These two diplomats had met in a hotel room for a secret conference, and when a servant entered the locked room, he found both men shot to death, apparently after a duel. That started the armies marching.

Some of the leading news correspondents of the world were covering that conference. Among them were John Keats, the American; Anton Stehli, the elderly Swiss; Alexandra Frantsovna, the pretty Russian girl; Kurt Nielsen, the Swede; Paul Emmerich, the Teuton; Dubail, the Esperenchman; and Philip Shepler, the English lad. An attempt made on Keats' life failed. Shepler was not so lucky. He was mortally wounded by an unknown assailant. Before Keats could go into these affairs, he and the rest of the correspondents found it advisable to leave the country hurriedly. They went to Esperance. Without warning, the Teutons began an aërial bombardment of the Esperench capital. Keats hurried off in search of Dubail.

CHAPTER VIII (*Continued*).

WAR!

"YEAH," a chewing-tobacco spoke up behind John Keats, "the guy's gone, all right, as I found out half an hour ago. Went somewhere to join the Air Corps, a guy was telling me. Secret flyin' base somewhere."

This story began in the Argosy for April 27

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Keats whirled at this loose-jointed shadow which had detached itself from the crowd around the Renault.

"Crazy Hooper!" Keats bellowed.

"That's me. I come here an hour ago lookin' for you. You said you was comin' here, an' when you didn't show up after a while I—"

"Frantsovna! Didn't I tell you to hold onto that woman—"

"What," the camera man grunted, "do you mean, woman? Wildcat's the word for that dame. Lookit this scratch on my kisser, can you see it? You'd been gone an hour when she decided to take it on the lam—"

"My God! She's got away—"

"Listen, it's time we all got away. Everybody's doing it. We was waitin' there in the Universe Building, the dame and me, when one of these police cars tore up the boulevard. Gang of gendarmes jumps out and starts scattering into all the buildings around that's left standing. Gendarme runs in at us and starts hollerin' through a megaphone. Spread the word to beat it. A plague was comin', he said. Teutons were gonna send torpedoes at midnight loaded with cholera germs. Bacteria stuff."

"Cholera! Good God!"

"That's what the gendarmes was yellin'. All citizens to get outa town. Three roads would be open to the coast, a couple of routes to Belgium and there's a highway open for automobiles to Switzerland. Well," Crazy hurried to say, "the Russian girl made a dive for the exit. 'I'm taking that road through Switzerland. Tell John-Keats to follow. Tell him I'm after the greatest news story he ever heard of.' Something like that. She hadda get to the Alps before the roads was blocked.

"I tried to stop her. *Zing!* she blew outa my hands. Next thing she's in a big blue automobile—"

Veins stood on John Keats' forehead. "How'd you get across town, Crazy?"

The camera man imitated a chuckle. "Took the first car I c'd lay hands on. A big Minerva. You shoulda seen me climb traffic to get here. But there's a fender an' one headlamp left. Yeah, I took the Major's car."

KEATS wiped slime from his forehead, staring. He flung a hand to his pocket, yanked out a book. "Listen, Crazy. I got this. From her room at the Savoy. It's—" His mouth gagged. That was no ordinary volume of Shakespeare's plays. His fingers must have jarred a hidden spring. Alexandra Frantsovna's little gilt-edged volume snapped like a rat trap, flew open. Shakespeare's plays were not all there. From "Two Gentlemen of Verona" to "Henry VIII" the plays were intact. From "Troilus and Cressida" to "Othello" the subject matter was missing, the pages gutted to form a hollow rectangular shell. Nesting in that secret hideaway was a snub-nosed Russian automatic and a shining clip of .38 caliber shells.

Keats shut the book with a whispery oath, jammed it into his coat. His face was lavender as he stormed at Crazy. "You saw that? Get going! They won't let us out of the airport. Get the car! We'll catch that woman if we have to steal God's own chariot to do it in. News story she's after? I'll show her some news! The rottenest story you ever heard! Come on!"

THE dairy farm of André Chibou, and André Chibou, himself, had retired at the customary twilight hour in the customary twilight peace.

Situated in that slumberous valley between Bois Chaperon Vert and Chuseville, two hundred miles and at least two hundred years from the capital, the dairy farm, like André, was as fixed in its ways as the ambient hills in rural landscape. Sundown on those snowy border peaks that marked the roof of Switzerland. To bed.

André, careful man, did not own a car. The old gray mare was fast enough for him. He did not own a radio. His interest stopped with the borders of his farm, bounded on the east by the main line railroad, on the west by a parallel turnpike, metal and concrete highways curving together towards the Alps.

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At three o'clock that afternoon the limited to Lake Geneva had streaked along the rails, and André had watched it go with a hand-wave. Around four o'clock a group of American girls in knickers (those mad Americans!) had bicycled up the road on their way to Bern. The day proceeded to wane in blues, pinks and golds. Black and white kine kneeling in emerald clover. Chickens at roost in the fruited barns. Larks wheeling above the yellow millet. Come 7 P.M., André saw no reason why he should not go to roost, too. But his wife turned on the stairs to declare she kept hearing thunder somewhere in the air, and he'd better see to the calves. The old woman, of course, was imagining things again. Thunder, nonsense. On this ripe summer evening with the dusk as clear and fragrant as Moselle?

He quarreled mildly with the old woman about this, slipped out of his cowboots, put on his nightcap and grunted into bed. He was dreaming cheerily that he'd just cheated Pierre Tulacque at the horse fair by trading him a mule for a full-blooded Percheron stallion, when a cry from his wife yanked him awake and upright in bed.

"André! What is that which is that?"

"What is that which is what?"

"In the barn yard. An automobile. I heard it turn in. There have been many fast cars on the road. Suddenly it stopped, this one."

André must grumble out of the eider-down, stub across the room, open the shutters. Warm moonlight, almost as bright as day, silvered countryside and roadway without. A long, dust-grayed roadster had parked under the poplar, and its driver was boldly drawing water at the well, slopping it into a steaming radiator. As André blinked from the window a number of motors flashed by in the moonlight. He called at the stranger who had stopped.

"A fellow who but wished to water his car," he complained to his wife when the intruder had gone. "Looked like a Norwegian, perhaps. These foreigners! Wanted to know if I had seen a Swiss go by, a Swiss with his arm in a sling, probably in a taxicab. When I told him certainly not, he thanked me with a curse and flung himself into his car and drove like the devil away. One of these dirty tourists with a big yellow bag on the seat beside him—"

"But you noticed many other cars on the road also?"

"There should be a law against it. Do people never sleep any more? It is almost ten by the clock."

"André, was that thunder in the sky?"

No sound. More like a fluttering of the air. "Nonsense. Go to sleep, Mathilde. Do not wake me up again."

BUT the cuckoo clock was hooting twelve when she woke him again. It was unprecedented. At that hour someone was knocking at the door. André Chibou glared cautiously, then indignantly from the upper window. A blue touring car in his dooryard, and a slip of a woman in a khaki trench-coat calling up at him. Did he have a telephone here? No? Then had he seen a roadster driven by a Swedish gentleman, a man with a big yellow kitbag? Had such a car, such a man gone by? *Sapristi,* was his dairy farm an information bureau? Then, the woman asked, was she on the direct route to Switzerland?

André Chibou told her she was. He could have told her another direct route she was on, a girl like that driving around unchaperoned at so godless an hour. The young foreign woman whisked her car back onto the road and flashed away. Name of a name! Look at the automobiles. André knuckled his eyelids, bade his wife get out of bed to witness.

Ventre bleu! was there a redness in the sky toward Switzerland? Maybe far-away heat lightning. But in the barn a rooster crowed. Regard the hour! Only midnight. And there was a train pounding up the railroad track for the Alps, headlight rushing up the metals, a full-lunged whistle on the curve. Never had there been a midnight express like that. André Chibou craned his neck out into the moonlight, eyes like saucers under the silly tassel of his nightcap. *"Sacré nom de Dieu!"*

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And then it came. Pouring down the turnpike out of the north. Slam-banging down the railroad. Roaring past the farm of André Chibou like two runaway rivers that had burst their dams somewhere in the night and were obligingly keeping to the edges of his pastures, going by his house on two sides. The turnpike, familiar to creaking wains and leisurely hay carts, began to grumble, rumble with the sound of a coming avalanche. The railroad came alive with a steaming, clanging rush. Twin streams pouring themselves toward Switzerland. The Army of Esperance! Mother of God! The Army!

By railroad and parallel turnpike two earth-shaking, smoking clouds boiled down the valley, horizontal columns of dust in the wine-clear moonshine. On the highroad came a squadron of motorcycles with wailing police sirens, an advance guard clearing civilian traffic to one side. Then a sixty-mile-an-hour fleet of staff cars. Motors and officers gray with dust. In the open tonneaus a glimpse of scarlet-topped *képis* and oak-leafed collars.

Next a dizzy file of army lorries, private cars, taxicabs, vans, trucks, automobiles of every description packed to the doors with powder-blue infantry. *Ziff*, the cars went by. *Ziff, ziff, ziff!* Tires singing on concrete. *"En Suisse!"* Hoarse yells above the continuous roar of gas engines. *"En Suisse!"*

THEN the cavalry. Squadron after squadron. Lancers with machine guns instead of spears. Dragoons; horsehair plumes blowing above their shining helmets. Mounted *Chasseurs d'Afrique*, picturesque in scarlet and blue. A company of Algerian *Spahis*, white turbans streaming in a thundering processional, crimson cloaks bannering. More staff cars. More regular cavalry. Then an interval filled with motor ambulances. Car after car marked with the Red Cross. After that a company of motorized Engineers. Followed by light artillery, battery after battery of *soixante-quinze*, clattering, clanging limbers, muzzles a-gleam in the dust, their gunners clinging for dear life to the skidding caissons. Horse-drawn rapid-fire guns. Mule-drawn ammunition carts. The jangle of chain and harness dying into a great thud-thud-thud of hobnailed boots. Now the men were coming. Miles of swinging shoulders, jogging heads. A torrent of feet on the road.

And the railroad parallel with the concrete pike. Shaking with the roar of flying trains. Locomotive following locomotive. Cattle cars jammed with men. Box cars jammed with men. *Quarante hommes—huit chevaux! Quarante hommes—huit chevaux!* Then the artillery trains. One after another at five minute intervals. Great railroad guns long as three ordinary flat-cars, their muzzles shrouded in tarpaulin. Anti-aircraft guns on special carriages. Naval cannon.

THE valley trembled. Soot from the railroad joined dust from the turnpike; under a stifling, varicolored, rolling blanket of coal smoke, gasoline fumes, dust, a thousand smells of sweat and cinders and leather, an amalgam of sounds that came from both sides, the dairy farm of André Chibou was engulfed. André himself was engulfed. At three o'clock of that moon-washed night every pullet was gone from his barn, every cow from his pasture, every cabbage from his patch, every drop from his well. Midway between two running rivers of steel, André stood at his farm yard gate with more worthless checks from the "War Office Supply Department" in his corduroy jeans than Stavisky ever passed in a lifetime of frauds. André's wife was getting back at the government by selling wine to thirsty faces at a dollar a bottle. And at exactly five minutes after three a dirt-plastered Minerva limousine came hooting and rocking along the line of marchers to stop with a scream of brakes at André's door.

Two grease-blackened men in civilian clothes sprang from the driver's seat. An American flag fluttered on the car's radiator cap (that had been Crazy Hooper's idea) and Papa Chibou read the legend *Diplo-*

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matic Party—League of Nations Government—Mission Extraordinaire painted in bold letters on the doors (John Keats' idea for getting through).

The two grease-blackened men were hardly off the running boards when a staff car sirened up behind them and a chubby colonel of infantry darted forward. But Crazy Hooper only grunted a mouthful of chocolate "no spik Esperench" and pointed at John Keats, and John Keats only held up an American passport and pointed at the writing on the car.

The colonel of infantry then shrugged and turned to buy a cup of wine from André's wife. After all, he was but a colonel of infantry, was it up to him to stop two Yankees on the road? The pair must be official or they could not have come up from behind. If they were not all right let the General Staff apprehend them up ahead.

For the hundredth time since midnight, John Keats drew a heady breath of relief. God knew how they'd gotten this far, but the magic had worked again. It seemed a thousand hours since he'd left the capital with Crazy. A million miles the Minerva had battled its way forward through this endless parade of men. The chant of those running feet was forever established in his head. The look of those nameless, unnumbered faces.

Every road south-east of the capital had been a river of soldiers, thickening from a thousand railway terminals, side roads and lanes, deeper and deeper with men as they neared the Swiss border. Summoned by radio, by telephone, by rocket signals, by a hundred modern Paul Reveres, Esperance was moving in the night.

KEATS pulled himself together with a start, motioned Crazy back to the car, and hurried at André Chibou.

"Listen, *mon père,* did you see by any chance a blue touring car go by in the early part of the night? A motor car driven by a Russian girl?"

André Chibou scraped and bowed. Not every night he was selling wine to army officers and consulted by League of Nations diplomats. "There were many cars tonight, *m'sieu.* Early before the coming of the army. A lady, one dressed in a sort of trench-coat stopped here, but—"

"Reddish haired foreigner? Gray eyes? A hat," Keats shouted, "not unlike a little white chimney braided with blue piping?"

"The same, *m'sieu,* and she drove away with much speed—"

"Good!" John Keats tossed a handful of francs at the rustic and leaped at the car. Hand on the door he paused, listened, turned his face skyward with an exclamation. A new sound had started in the night. A vast, insistent drone that loudened as it swept up over the horizon behind the running army, penetrated the valley's thunder, shook the stars. Next minute the very constellations were eclipsed as if by a heaven-high passage of locusts, a nocturnal migration of countless birds. Out of the south they came, headed north-eastward, an orbit of comets streaking as the crow flies for the Rhine. The tumult of an earthly army corps was obscured by that sound. The heavens were darkened, blotted out. A black torrent rushed across the face of the summer moon. Planes! Battle planes and giant bombers. Aërial battleships convoyed by aërial destroyers. Dreadnaughts of the stratosphere motored with a dozen engines, armed with .75 cannon. Weird helicopters. Observation and pursuit hawks. Mailed seaplanes from the coast. Buzzing auto-gyros, tiny one-man hornets, giant fifty-man cruisers. For an incredible moment the entire firmament was swallowed.

Then they were gone.

Keats found the chubby colonel at his elbow. Tears streamed on the man's uplifted face. "The air fleet of Esperance!" he cried. "In an hour every ship we have will be above the capital of Teutony. The Boche will see—"

Planes over Teutony. Reprisal!

"Crazy! Get going! She's still up ahead!"

The dynamite was blowing. Too late to stop catastrophe, but he'd find the hand

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that had fired the fuse, if it was the last thing he lived to do.

CHAPTER IX.

GODEK PASS.

AT that moment when André said good-by to the "League of Nations Government" officials (and so passed out of the story), a lurching Esperench taxi-cab was screeching to a halt in an Alpine village some ninety miles away.

"Name of a pig!" the driver snarled at his passenger, his voice muffled by one of those dirty scarfs that European taxi men are liable to wear, "never have I made such a drive. The fare is four thousand francs."

Grease-smeared to his hair, clad in an ashcan topcoat, the cabby looked a pirate, shifty-eyed, unable to stare his passenger in the face. The rumpled passenger made no protest. In shapeless clothes, scraps of paper sticking from every pocket, he was not unlike a scarecrow, himself, a dummy losing its stuffing. His sling-bandaged arm impeded a reach for the wallet, and the cabby's anxiety to get away openly increased.

"If I were you," he muttered at his fare, "I'd get out of here, home or no home." Then, without waiting for the money, the taxi fled.

Anton Stehli stayed. He did not seem to realize the car had gone. Leaning on the doorsill of his cottage, he looked about him. His eyes were strangely untroubled. The village was still here. He said, "I'm home," and mused gravely at this cobblestone street precarious on the mountain where the first chill of the snowcaps began. Little stone cottages with pottery roofs. Dr. Marcel's *Kurhaus,* white walls and red tile, where the nervous old ladies came for the springwater cure. Randoval's Inn, favorite resort of the winter skiing parties. Church, town clock, market place, pump. It was a clean little place, a village for quaint mountaineers in Alpine hats, for china-toy sheep, for yodeling and accordion playing and soundless sleeps in deep feather beds. But the little pottery-roofed cottages were empty. The nervous old ladies, the guests of the inn had gone away. Instead of the tinkle of cowbells or the genial call of the watch, the high altitude quiet was smashed into a thousand rolling echoes, a titanic thunderstorm toiled and flamed on the slopes a mile below.

Standing alone in that upper calm, one commanded such a view as God might have if He stood on a step of heaven to scan the Pits. Stehli waited in the cool of the stars, and below him raged the Damnation. Where an electric railway had branched like a compass, westward to Esperance, south to Lucerne, northward to Teutony, the indigo night was being blasted away in eruptions of dazzling fire. The thunder of an avalanche echoed like the crashing of peaks down the pass. Continuous electricity above a boiling blanket of cloud that hung from valley rim to valley rim in the appearance of lower weather. But the storm was no work of climatic change. That lightning, Stehli knew, was the flame of Switzerland's naval guns, and the sound was Switzerland falling.

FAR down the valley the forts of the Confederation were making their final stand. Furnace-hot gun pits cracking in their beds of Alpine rock. Rolling lines of shattered cannoneers. The White Cross of Switzerland had long since been shot away: against the enemy coming, Arnold von Winkelried could have done as much with an arrow; the little republic's naval guns were dogs barking at the legs of a mastodon. Where the great divide opened eastward, its lower walls lay in a sea of darkness. That way was Helvania; from the looks of her outpost mountains the little kingdom remained asleep. Where the divide narrowed westward the sky was a sullen flame; the war dogs of Esperance had joined the fray. Too late for Switzerland, though. Old Stehli told himself he was just in time. But then, instead of going into his cottage for shelter, he took the path hurrying to the courtyard in the

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rear. Crossed a low-walled garden of sunflowers and Alpine shrubs to a stand of dove cotes and rustic birdhouses pyramided in corbie-steps at the garden's back.

One after another the startled birds took wing as the Swiss moved from cote to cote, thumping, calling, opening the little cuckoo-clock doors. Anton Stehli was holding a white pigeon in his blunt, typewriter-gnarled hands when a gray-green motor car suddenly appeared on the high road like a rocket shot from the stormclouds below. Brakes screamed as the car turned into the village main street, halted before Stehli's cottage. Stehli ran from the courtyard to see what had happened, and what had happened was a be-spectacled young man in an elephant-colored greatcoat and bowl-shaped iron helmet, leaping from the car to chalk a Teuton numeral on Anton Stehli's door. From door to door the glassy-eyed man scampered with his arithmetic, the gray-green car dashed on toward the market place—then the thing came.

It was gray. It came up the mountain at sixty miles an hour like a reversed river of lava, chugging, smashing, clawing its way uphill, chewing the face from meadow, pasture and culvert, eating up the flank of the valley like an enormous skybound glacier. The company of Swiss *Chasseurs* and mounted Alpine riflemen, suddenly sprouted from hidden entrenchments below the village, was swept away like glass before a firehose. A pyrotechnic scroll of green fire swept like surf over the trenches where the Swiss troops had been. In that single breath trenches and men were immolated. The Juggernaut came on.

FIRST a wave of iron caterpillars. Snub-nosed tanks manned by driver and gunner, the gunner in a turret operating a nozzle of liquid fire. Crashing over meadow and haystack, flattening stone walls, crushing every boulder, shrub, stick, fence-post in the way. Then a herd of giant tanks, trooping like dinosaurs on the heels of their young. Great trapezoidal mammoths with swinging heads and trampling centipede feet, pulverizing the wreckage.

An astounding company of monsters followed the wake of the tank corps. Scavengers. Anton Stehli was reminded of insects magnified gigantic by an opium dream. Great iron measuring worms. Huge steel grasshoppers. Nodding mechanical mantas that hissed and spat and dug and scraped at the mutilated landscape. There were machines that levelled the wreckage, colossal steamrollers. Machines that swept the earth with spinning wire brushes. Caterpillar steam-shovels that would pause to scoop up mouthfuls of rubbish and hurl it aside. Machines with enormous noses that resembled vacuum cleaners, inhalers to suction up shell fragments, human fragments, refuse. Machines that sprayed the air with purifying chemicals and spread the ground with white lime.

Tank corps and clean-up squad roared up the mountainside, smashing opposition, clearing the path, unrolling a road where no road had been before, and the hosts of Vulcan followed. At the edge of the village the giants stopped to draw back in formation; the army came through. An armada of armored cars, painted in that *feldgrauen* camouflage that melted into a streaking blur before the eye; the flash, flash, flash of light on their gun-barrels racing through the village like the passing of shells. Then the motorized camions, giant heavy artillery on ten-wheeled trucks, siege guns half a block long dragged by thunderous twenty-caterpillar teams hitched tandem to each piece. Then the light artillery, mobile, every piece motorized, the latest in science from the shops of Essen. Guns for gas, for shrapnel, for projectiles that exploded clouds of bacteria, muzzles fuming from their recent assault, their gun crews leaning from the turrets naked and black to the waist. Followed by lumbering truck-loads of ammunition, shells that smashed, shells that dug, shells that poisoned earth and sky and water.

Behind these flying gun-batteries came the thousand and one departments to each unit. The trucks of the quartermaster corps, the signal fleet—radio, telephone, searchlight equipment — motorized field

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kitchens, hospitals on wheels, ambulance after ambulance. Then the anti-aircraft batteries, the Army Topographical Sections, a fleet of motorcycles with machine-guns mounted on sidecars, trucks to unreel barbed wire at full speed, trucks labeled "Sanitary Corps," trucks labeled "G.H.Q." No circus ever moved with such precision. No traffic ever traveled at so diabolical a pace.

AS the first armored car raced through, a squad of traffic officials on motorcycles had appeared in the village square, directing this mechanized onslaught with winking searchlights and colored semaphore signals. There was no hitch, no stalling, no wrong turning or going off the road. Behind every gun battery an automobile of officers had slewed into a side lane, the majors, colonels, lieutenants and their aides piling out like firemen and occupying the cottages without bothering to knock. By the time the batteries were gone, the troops were coming through.

First the machine gunners, twenty to a truck, gray-green men in jaunty forage caps, singing and bawling, features sweat-plastered, mouths squalling victorious song. "Glory—and love to the men of old—" To the radiator of each truck was fastened a flag flying the Trefoil Insignia and on the side of each was painted the legend, *Gott Mit Uns.*

Then the men with machine-gun rifles, crack marksmen of the Reichswehr, faces expressionless under bucket helmets. Truck after truck of these sharpshooters; followed by load upon load of Work Troopers in khaki, youngsters equipped at last with Mausers in place of shovels; and finally the regulars, the gray-green Reichswehr Infantry in gray-green lorries; their coalscuttle helmets going by in torrents, the lorries roaring two abreast in a never-ending stream. Never had there been such an invasion, and never such an army. Not a single man on foot. Not a cavalry patrol. Instead of the old fashioned rifles of World War days, their arms were the latest of modern design firing smokeless powder and a cartridge that did not flash. Saw-tooth bayonets. On the breast of each soldier the newest in gas equipment, masks for every conceivable chemical and emergency. On each belt a machine-gun pistol capable of twin rapid-fire discharges of ten bullets a second.

Against the monster Goliath-machines of the tank corps, against the technicians who drove those mechanical behemoths, against this mechanized army of racing armored cars and truck-loads of man power, the disorganized taxi-driven *poilus,* the gaudy cavalry and blistered foot soldiers of Esperance would have no more chance than had the roofs of their capital against the aërial torpedoes.

ALREADY the Swiss Republic was paralyzed, her borders swept into history. The mountains themselves trembled under the blow. In that Alpine village through which the Teutonic hydra was advancing, the cottages were crumbling from nothing more than the sound of wheels. Infantry and more infantry, gray-green, endless in flood. Baggage vans. Little barber shops on wheels. Operating rooms on wheels. Garages on wheels. Whizzing car loads of solid rubber tires for replacements. Tank trucks of gasoline, each with a score of pumps for thirsty motors. Tank trucks of water for the men. Great motor sprinklers to vanquish the dust. A truck labeled "Propaganda" drawing aside in the public square, boys leaping from its rear step to plaster the village walls with showcards. *Switzerland Surrender!—Teutonland eüber alles!—Teutony was betrayed! Schnitzler comes to bring peace!—We promise you Switzerland will be Free!*

"Free for what," Anton Stehli snarled under his breath. "Free for the Teutons."

Stunned to an image by the passing Moloch, suffocated in dust and blue petrol fumes, he could only hug the door of his cottage; could not draw his eyes from the thing. Time stopped. The sun must be rising in Helvania, but the clock in Switzerland had lost its hands. Imagination

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quit. In that limitless period from darkness to morning a half million men, every one a twin in discipline, dress, almost in facial expression, must have been transported from the north to the south side of an Alpine pass. An entire division of Swiss infantry, an entire chain of Swiss forts had been whisked to oblivion, smashed up, cremated, threshed like wheat in those awful mowing machines, turned to dust and blown away.

And now the conquering rulers arrived. Long columns of gray-green limousines. Goggle-helmeted chauffeurs driving the masters of Armageddon in balloon-tired cars as smooth as cats. *Generalstabsoffiziers* in their spike-topped field helmets, their buckles, beltings and tabs, lounging in steel-lined luxury behind windows of shatterproof glass. Pullman-type trailers, gas-and-bulletproof, in which the brigadiers, the scientists, the be-spectacled and be-monocled generals-of-division sat at tables over reports and maps. Armored sedans filled with artillery generals working over decimals, corps commanders, electrical wizards, high-ranks of every description. Each car was convoyed by a cordon of motorcycles, liaison officers, and in every car was a radio telephone.

So this was the culmination of effort from Franklin, Marconi, Steinmetz. Wireless telephones in armored automobiles to direct the movements of tanks and cannon. McCormick had invented the way toward a Grim Reaper; the fruits of Roger Bacon were smokeless shells; Hippocrates' last chapter a projectile of bacteria; the final concept of Christianity as written on that banner above one of the Reichswehr lorries —*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God!*

ANTON STEHLI turned from that parade of staff cars with an oath in the prongs of his mustache. It was then he discovered another occupant of his doorstep, another who watched this Martian review.

"Nielsen—"

"I say, Stehli—I was wondering when you'd look around."

Sitting on his upended kitbag, the Swedish correspondent was jotting industriously on a little writing-pad. Swinging to his feet, he fitted monocle to eye with a practised twist, and flirted a motoring glove at the scene. "Jove! I got through in my car just before they came. Hid it behind the *kurhaus* and came up here behind you to watch." He shouted above din, "Gad, man, what a story! Last survivor, and all that. By heaven, you must be the last Swiss alive in the place. Standing on your doorstep, don't y'know, and watching the invaders go by. By God, and with a dove in your hand—"

Stehli's eyes dulled at Nielsen's enthusiasm. "Story?"

The Swede made a gesture of sympathy. "Of course. It is hard on you, old man. But the Heinies seem to be going right through. Gad, they've done it again. Circled the Esperench forts along the Rhine and caught 'em off guard, *via* the Swiss Alps." He shouted through cupped hands. "You're safe enough here, by the looks. They won't bother a non-combatant. Me, I'm on my way to Helvania. You wouldn't," he nodded at the cottage door, "have a bottle of wine to spare a fellow? Drove all night, and I'm burning up."

"Of course, Nielsen. Bring in your luggage. Until they rob me of my home, you are my guest."

On the cobbles before the cottage wheels screamed. A jamming of hot brakes. Somewhere far at the head of the parade there was a stoppage. Then the valley became livid with the light of an unnatural western sky. A wild panorama was illumined. The western neck of the divide took flame. Far below the mountain the army of Esperance, in all its hodge podge of futile color, was pouring into the pass. Powder-blue columns of *poilus*. Streams of Blue devils, *Chasseurs*, Legionnaires. Gun batteries and cavalry brilliant in sudden revelation under a fired sky. The dawn that had betrayed them was the flashing of enemy star shells. Their railroad guns were too late. Their scouting planes, caught in a zodiac of shellfire, fell down out of the sky

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in burning showers. An avalanche of flame rolled down the sides of Godek Pass. Tanks dashed down the mountain flanks like thunderbolts. The snorting, gnawing engines of extermination followed. The gray-green armored cars, firing as they charged. A lava of men and guns engulfed the slopes of the divide.

In that livid explosion of daylight, Stehli saw a racing caterpillar dragon catch an advance patrol of Esperench lancers. Horses and men burst asunder in a scarlet crash. Truckloads of gray-green machine gunners poured through the breach. An answering barrage of *soixante-quinze* shrapnel rattled off the Teuton tanks like so much hail. Under a clanging, thundering, mulcting bombardment of shells, the Esperench advance was smothered. *Poilus* and *Chasseurs,* gaudy Colonials and charging lancers melted away. Switzerland stood handcuffed. Esperance was burning at the stake.

GENERAL of Division, Gottlieb von Neumann, lowered Zeiss binoculars, turned from the shatterproof observation window of his car to grin at the officer beside him. Parked on an elevation screened by spruce, the staff car allowed an unobstructed view of battle lines below. The general's astringent features were bright with disciplined enthusiasm. His eyes were points of flint sharpening the face under its monkish pall of clipped hair.

"They're beaten. They cannot last another hour. Observe the fine work of those tanks among that brigade of *poilus. Himmel!* our infantry will have nothing to do. Stand this way, my boy, the view is magnificent."

"Thank you, Herr General."

"Watch the havoc of our liquid fire. Different than the last war, eh, my boy?"

"*Ja,* Herr General."

But Paul Emmerich remained standing as he was, motionless, eyes fixed on nothingness in the smoke, face a pale carving, gray, masking nausea against that Roman Holiday below and hiding repugnance for the older man at his elbow. *Grüss Gott!* how could his uncle watch this carnage with the pleasure of a patrician at a gladiatorial show? Studying as calmly as a connoisseur might observe painted cavalry on a canvas by Messonier. The reds pleased the old man who didn't like pastels?

Paul Emmerich secretly shivered. In the valley men were dying in droves. No more to Uncle Gottlieb than the death of flies on paper. Yet he had seen this saturnine man sit up half the night with a sick hunting dog. It was not his fault. This was the old school and war a game. Esperench and Teutons, once in soldier suits, were not bleeding, agonized individuals, but chesspieces, numbers in a game. These mountains were a problem in higher mathematics, and pain had no part in the arithmetic.

"Battery Ten Start Firing Position X-A-Y. Hold Steady Fire 370s on Point 19." He could hear his uncle's voice snappering at the telephone mouthpiece that was strapped like a phone girl's instrument on his chest. Ear-phones on his head were catching numbers from the ether. "Crossfire Z to A on Elevation Sixteen."

Crossfire Z to A on Elevation 16. The niceties of code. How much neater than shouting, "Turn those blow torches on the Spahis trapped on that hill and cook them alive." Emmerich bit his underlip, turning away. Mustn't let the old man see his face. Especially when the general had relaxed into calling him "my boy." A breach of etiquette almost beyond the rules. Uncle must be pleased. In half an hour Esperance would be cremated, and in this secure and furbished motorcar another victory recorded to his uncle's undying credit; another Iron Cross for the family's trophy case.

"Major Emmerich!"

PAUL turned in guilt. Von Neumann had put aside his phone to watch him sharply. Had those steely eyeballs penetrated his thoughts? But the general merely put a hand with friendly pressure on his nephew's shoulder and, sure none of the staff in the car's forward end was look-

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ing, said, "You are tired, Paul. All of us need sleep badly. Very soon you will go off duty."

"I am all right, sir."

"*Nein.*" The general frowned. "I know. You take it too hard, my boy. I am sorry about what happened to your father."

Paul nodded silently. His father. He had almost forgotten that irony. His mind listlessly moved backward to that library scene—two nights ago, or centuries?—when the word had come. In the fierce excitement, the glory of his son's leave-taking, Balduin Emmerich had died. Sudden riches and a call to the colors had been too much for Herr Emmerich's patriotic heart. Paul had left him there among his books, left his mother standing, face in white hands—

"As for your mother," the general whispered hurriedly, "it is true the Esperench air fleet bombed the city. The report, I fear, cannot be denied. But the city was well prepared, and I am certain she would be safely taken to the gas cellars and bombproofs.

"What is more, our anti-aircraft shot the swine fleet to pieces."

He snapped his fingers, spun, recited numbers into the phone. In the fore part of the car a tele-type machine was chattering. A half dozen officers, their faces under shaved heads solemn as Buddhist priests, hunched around the operator. The man at the instrument was translating code messages in the voice of a jubilant radio announcer.

The tele-type was not unlike a news reel in constant communication with distant events. Soviet troops were marching in the Far East. Great Britain was remaining neutral. America had protested the shelling of Esperance without declaration of war. Italy was busy with Abyssinia. G.H.Q. reported Swiss army in general retreat and Confederation making overtures for surrender.

"Esperench capital evacuated, all industrial centers paralyzed, all Rhine forts in state of demolition. Esperench government reported rioting, troops at point of mutiny, all front line arms in full retreat—

"Second G.H.Q. report—no sign mobilization in Helvania—"

THE tele-type signed off with a rattle of code. Staff officers made sounds of approval. Helmets nodded enthusiasm. Schnitzler had succeeded in localizing the conflict. Nothing could stop Teutony now. A general of the Chemical Corps flushed exultantly. It was the threat of bacteria bombs that had broken the Esperench morale.

High priests of war, they crowded to the lookout windows and periscopes, clucking and chuckling, congratulating themselves on their stratagems. This steel-lined armored motor-Pullman was like a club filled with stodgy members suddenly animated by a rise on the exchange. Paul Emmerich watched the valley below with conviction of its unreality. Impossible men were dying in that lower sea of flame. The walls of the car were as proof against that conflict's thunder as the generals were proofed against compassion. Not a shell-crash was audible. The car was air-cooled. Only the constant tremor of the steel floor betrayed the travail of the slopes below.

He lowered the binoculars, suddenly summoned to action by his radio phone. Voices barked. Generals wrote feverishly. General von Neumann was working at a set of switchboard dials, an automatic map sprinkled with colored bulbs that twinkled in the topography like stars. One pushed a button in this secure car and a brigade of motorcycle Uhlans five miles away charged into action. One jotted a calculation, spoke to a phone, and a siege gun behind a mountain peak destroyed a train of boxcars beyond the horizon.

Paul Emmerich saw his uncle, his uncle's staff generals, this steel car with its water coolers and leather arm chairs and manifold mechanisms as a whirring, clicking, soulless, meaningless heart to a gigantic robot built for nothing but death. Himself a cog, a comptometer, an automaton without mind for anything but obedience

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to the wheels behind. A curious rebellion was in him. He stood at an instrument reciting decimals that sent other men out to die and kill, unable to stop his own voice, but his mind was a picture of a hotel room where two men sat dead at a dining table, and an American newspaper man grinned nervously against a wall.

A sudden silence in the headquarters car caught him staring like a skull. Everything seemed to have stopped at once. He turned to learn the meaning of this dislocation in the heart of the machinery, and saw the tele-type operator, tense, white-lipped, spectacles winking, lean up from his stalled instrument. The man's teeth shone.

"It has come! Esperance has surrendered. Hostilities to cease in the sector of Godek Pass at once—"

IT was over. Any minute the Swiss would forward their surrender at this news. Incredibly the Teutons had won. Less than fifty hours advance, hardly four hours of actual combat, and the armies of Esperance had been smashed. Paul Emmerich got his tired legs out of the staff car, stood on a grassy Alpine knoll, and surveyed the scene of victory with a spinning head. Far down the divide the thunder was retreating in a salvo of echoes; daylight was coming.

In the crystalline heights above him an Alpine snowcap colored to rose in a canopy of cloudless azure, and a little Swiss village, a nest of storybook cottages and pottery roofs came into view. *Gott!* if he could learn what had happened to his mother back home he could almost celebrate. Thank God the War Lords had had their fling, and the thing was out of their systems. Out of the valley's smoke the armored cars, the tanks, the trucks that had been in action were coming back. "Fatherland—Dear Fatherland!" In the blue upper stillness the voices of the men massed into hymn. Good lads, they'd gotten out of it in time with few casualties, after all. He passed a hand through the ashen streak in his hair, and watched the trucks. The men were cheering. Like himself, they'd come here because they had to; were doing this job because of an ideal.

He sighed and leaned tired shoulders against a cool spruce. A little shrapnel. A big adventure. A few wounded comrades. Fellowship and courage. Maybe Uncle Gottlieb was right. Fatherland bigger than self. Duty above all.

Then his eyes were arrested by a carload that had not been so lucky. He saw the van was moving slowly because of its Red Cross. The driver steered along the road-edge where the pace was leisurely; halted not far from Emmerich to let a motorized battery clatter past. Somewhere within the ambulance a voice of pain was screaming and screaming, and the obbligato was not decent against a fiesta of happy cheers.

The driver was scowling, as Emmerich moved forward inquiringly.

The Red Cross chauffeur saluted. *"Ja,* Herr Major, the man is one of ours. Some Esperench swine with a handful of fire grenades got a few of our boys. This fellow took it pretty bad."

Paul Emmerich walked to the rear of the car; peered in. Upper tiers were loaded with silent, quiescent cripples; but the floor was occupied by a lone man of enormous girth who tossed and shouted and beat about in his strapped-down blankets. In his raving he had ripped the bandage from his side to expose an ulcerous, fly-blown hole, black with scorched blood, ordure and bits of straw, that gaped like a shellhole in a house. The man's pudgy face was repulsive with the sweat of pain.

"Frieda!" he was screaming. *"Ach Gott,* my little girl. My wife! My babies! Frieda! The piano lessons! My wife!"

Then he lifted his head to look at Paul Emmerich, and an animal cry burst from his lips. "It is Paul! The newspaper fellow who sits in staff cars writing with a pen! While I am dying, shot to pieces, gun meat—"

"Gussie!" Paul Emmerich screamed.

"Go away," was the answering wail, "and be damned to you! Not a button out of place on your uniform! Go away,

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you bloody goose-necked aristocrat swine, and be damned—"

WEARILY Paul Emmerich turned from the ambulance to see uproar breaking around the staff car. Something was happening, and he was wanted. But he was too ill at heart to take recognition of the affair until, from a babble of shouts, he caught another familiar name.

Paul Emmerich's face went hard and white, and he ran to the car where a dispatch rider was snapping a hurry-call for General von Neumann. The man's motorcycle which had raced down from the village chugged between his spread legs, and his words were loud with excitement. Something about newspaper writers. A Swede, a Russian woman and a Swiss, in a cottage up there. Swiss, it appeared, was resident of the place. House had been assigned to Field Marshal von Reinmar, commanding all Teuton armies in the field, who had meant to occupy it for private headquarters. Two rooms in the cottage, and the *Feld-Marshal* had generously allowed the neutral press correspondents to go on with their meal in the front room while the Swiss showed the general to a bedroom in the back.

And there, deliberately, the Swiss had shot Von Reinmar through the head. Cold-blooded assassination. Second in command, General von Neumann would investigate. The Swiss, a newspaper man himself, denied murdering the Field Marshal, but the two were alone together when the general was slain. And certain papers discovered on the floor of the room implicated the Kingdom of Helvania.

"He was an internationally known correspondent. His name is Anton Stehli."

CHAPTER X.

ANTON STEHLI.

MORNING light shafted in a golden dust through the cottage windows and polished the spiked helmets with a refulgent shine. The faces of generals steamed and glittered. The cottage was not made for generals, and their stern field coats, buckles and clanking side arms marred the room. Furniture had been kicked aside, bric-a-brac dashed from the fireplace mantel to make space for radio and phone apparatus, curtains torn down for more light, a splendidly carved table dragged centerward to play rostrum for the weighty elbows of the judges.

A man had been ruthlessly killed. They lay by thousands in the valley, but that was war. This was different. The dead man was a Field Marshal, and slain by a civilian. It was against the rules. It was murder. The generals were outraged, their foreheads dark with indignation.

As General Gottlieb von Neumann crisply summed up the case: "The murderer may expect no mercy from this drumhead court. We can waste no time in these proceedings. A state of war continues with Switzerland, and our troops occupied this village under rules of warfare. Our army commander was treacherously assassinated by this so-called civilian. Our soldiers must, and will be, protected from such gross violations of military code. Moreover, it becomes obvious the government of a neighboring country is behind this attack."

The general made a sudden swivel in his chair, pointing across the room. "You, there. Your name is Kurt Nielsen? You witnessed the crime, so?"

Nielsen lunged away from the fireplace, hands in pockets. "I did not see it, General," he corrected coolly. "You understand, the Field Marshal's arrival was quite unanticipated. He walked in without announcement, his staff remaining in the street outside. Stehli, Miss Frantsovna (she had arrived but a few minutes before the general, you understand) and I—we were seated at breakfast. You see, we hadn't eaten since—"

"This court is not interested in your personal misadventures."

"Of course. Well, Anton Stehli had offered us the kindest hospitality considering the—er—unusual circumstances. At any rate, he had bestowed my luggage in the

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back room where I would certainly have enjoyed a nap until the, shall I say, conquering general made his appearance—"

General von Neumann brought his glove down on the table with a mailed-fist crash. "Cut your story short, Herr Nielsen, and leave out the long newspaper adjectives, or we may forget your traveling credentials—"

THE Scandinavian shrugged coolly. "No need to bullyrag, man. Your staff will do well to deal kindly with representatives of a neutral press association. Don't pull any more Nurse Cavell blunders. Public opinion wins wars, you know. Herr Emmerich, whom I see has translated himself into a major, can tell tell you the power behind my syndicate."

His monocle turned at Emmerich a reproachful stare. Paul Emmerich stirred unhappily. Why in the name of *Lieber Gott* must he cross the lives of these people at this time?

But his uncle thundered, "Get on with your story, Herr Nielsen!" and the unruffled Swede managed a bow.

"The general stalked into the cottage, as I was telling you. When he saw we were newspaper writers he was, naturally, polite. Didn't wish to intrude. Sorry to disturb us. We might finish our repast. Stehli, as host under compulsion, showed the man into that back room."

"The Swiss led Field-Marshal von Reinmar to the room in back?"

"Correct."

"The back room was unoccupied?"

"I suppose. You see, I was dining. Embarrassing situation all around. Miss Frantsovna sat powdering her nose, if you must have details. I walked to the front window to see how the war was going outside. Didn't hear any shot. You couldn't have heard a bomb with the racket going on. Then Stehli gave a yell and came running. I turned and saw the Field Marshal stretched out on the floor of the bedroom, beyond that door."

"What did you do then, Herr Nielsen?"

"Stood with my mouth open, no doubt. I said, 'Why did you do it, Stehli, they'll shoot you for this.' He looked stunned. He said, 'My God, I didn't shoot him. We were alone back there. I don't know where the shot came from.'" Nielsen took a cigarette from a case in his vest and blinked his monocle at Paul Emmerich's stone-featured face. "I say, Emmerich, this is terrible. Somehow I can't believe Stehli shot the man, you know.

"Well," to Von Neumann, "then the Field Marshal's staff rushed in. That's all I know."

The generals glared in silent wrath. General von Neumann barked, "Dismissed!" at Nielsen, and stabbed a thumb at Alexandra Frantsovna who stood in white silence across the floor. Papers, passport documents crackled under the general's fingers. "You, now. You are Alexandra Frantsovna, war correspondent representing *Izvestia* and the *Pravda* syndicate, U.S.S.R.?"

She said quietly, "I am," looking coldly at Paul Emmerich.

"What are you doing in this occupied territory?"

"Taking the best road across Switzerland to Helvania where my editors are sending me after news. I was not aware I was entering front lines."

"You were unaware that this end of Godek Pass was in a state of war?"

"For that matter," the girl said with a show of anger, "it is my business to be in territory where there is a state of war, and those credential papers also allow me the privilege. Is this a court of frontier examination, a court of news censorship, or a military inquiry?"

THE division general colored angrily. "*Gott strafe* these newspapers, it is enough to conduct a campaign without having to deal with a pack of idiotic reporters running about in the way. I am going to take authority in my own hands and deport you writers across the border." His eyes blazed. "Undoubtedly you are a pack of spies!"

The girl said quietly, "Moscow might

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resent such an implication, Herr General, made against a non-combatant Soviet citizen."

"When did you enter Switzerland?" he demanded.

"About four o'clock this morning."

"You came by motor from Esperance?"

"Yes."

"Your passport shows you were, two nights ago, in Teutony."

"Am I on trial for espionage?" Alexandra Frantsovna demanded. "If so, I should like word with the Soviet Embassy in your capital. Since Russia and Teutony are not at war, and I am a neutral citizen—"

Paul Emmerich spoke out in a low tone, "If you will permit me, General von Neumann, I can substantiate that much of Fräulein Frantsovna's story. She, as well as Herr Nielsen and—" he spoke the name with effort, "Herr Stehli were all in the Teutonic capital on the Gatreau-Von Speer story."

"And you might tell old lamp-jaws," Nielsen added in English, "that as long as the battle seems to be over we'd like to find a telegraph somewhere and send our dispatches and get the hell out of here. I'm sorry as the devil for old Anton Stehli, but—"

"Quiet!" General von Neumann roared. "You will be out of here soon enough. Proceed with your story, Fräulein, and be brief."

The Russian girl said steadily, "I drove my car into this village two hours ago, left it in the market place and walked around hunting an *auberge*. Then your soldiers came, but could not molest me when I showed my papers. An officer was kind enough to inform me I could find several newspaper correspondents in this cottage, and I was glad to meet Herr Stehli and Herr Nielsen. On their invitation I joined them at breakfast. Herr Nielsen has accurately described what then occurred."

"You sat eating at table? From where you were seated you could see into the back bedroom?"

"I could not," she said slowly, as if the admission was painful in utterance. "The door was at an angle."

"However," her inquisitor snarled, "you saw the Swiss, the accused, lead Field Marshal von Reinmar into that back room?"

She nodded without speaking.

"You heard the shot, Fräulein?"

"No. I heard nothing." Her gray eyes traveled about the room in helpless appeal. "Herr Stehli ran—ran out as Herr Nielsen has told you. That is all."

"*Sehr gut!*" Von Neumann dismissed the girl with a curt nod. A burly staff officer made notions on a report blank, read them in muffled staccato into his radio phone. General von Neumann coughed to clear his throat. "Now! Bring forward Anton Stehli."

FOR the first time since that parting in the Café Guste, Paul Emmerich found his eyes meeting Stehli's. Hands trussed behind his back, the Swiss had been held face to wall in a corner between a knot of guards; as his escort prodded him to mid room and he staggered to the table he threw Emmerich a look that was not to be soon forgotten. Fear wasn't in that haggard face. But bewilderment. Reproach. An expression in those blue eyes, too, of defiance for these army priests and all they stood for.

"I did not do it," he said simply; and Paul Emmerich was filled with uneasiness and confusion.

General von Neumann sprang to his feet; leaned across the table. "Address your statements to the court. You are a Jew?"

Stehli's head came up. "I am," pridefully.

"Of Swiss nationality?"

"Yes."

"This is your native village."

"It was my home until the invader robbed it from me."

A medley of oaths, angry foot-scuffings, grunts muttered up from the table of officers. "So," Von Neumann snarled, "you are a patriot."

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Stehli replied scornfully, "I am a citizen and a non-combatant. Patriotism breeds chauvinism. Chauvinism breeds generals. Generals breed war. I do not believe in war as an instrument of settling international disputes. I am a pacifist."

"Ha!" Von Neumann stormed. "Glib, aren't you? A coward in the bargain. Refuse to meet an enemy face to face in warfare, but lead him into a trap where you may shoot him in the back."

Paul Emmerich looked at Stehli in dreary apprehension. The man's conduct was unsettling in the face of his guilt. He neither flinched nor cringed. Perspiration glimmered on the wide forehead under a tousled thatch of gray, but his eyes reflected no alarm.

"I did not shoot Von Reinmar. I am no coward. Besides, I have nothing to fear."

"I will give you something to fear," General von Neumann said in a flat, deadly voice. "A wall before a firing squad. You would deny your guilt with your last breath, Jew?"

"I did not kill Field Marshal von Reinmar," said Anton Stehli quietly. "I had no gun."

"You led him into that back room?"

"Rather, he ordered me to take him there."

"You were back there alone?"

"I saw no one but ourselves. The windows were down. The room was fusty, for I had been away several weeks. I walked to a back window, lowered it a few inches, heard what I thought was a muffled shot. I turned and saw the general falling over backwards.

"Blood streamed from his temple. He struck the floor dead. I do not know where the bullet came from."

Von Neumann grimaced, "But you imply he might have been shot by one of these two correspondents at that time in this front room?"

Stehli turned tired eyes toward Nielsen and the Russian girl posed along the wall. Then he said with firm decision, "They could not have done it. Von Reinmar was out of line with the door. No. I believe them as innocent as myself."

GENERAL VON NEUMANN'S fist crashed the table. "This is enough. *Grüss Gott!* the dirty Swiss would have us believe the Field Marshal shot himself!"

Anton Stehli said harshly, "Let me remind my accusers that to shoot a man one must possess a weapon, specifically a gun. Thirty seconds after this shooting, Von Reinmar's men were in the room. Did they find a gun?"

"Nor will they spend time hunting for one, *nein!* Obviously you carried it in the sling of that bandaged arm and where you disposed of it is your affair; enough for us to know you will never employ it again. Your inconsistent lie of innocence is scarcely supported by the evidence, and," he snatched an envelope from the table, "*this!*"

Grim lines deepened in Stehli's face. "I never saw it before."

"It was found on the floor by the men who picked up Field Marshal von Reinmar's body! Did you see it then?"

"It was not there when first we entered the room," Stehli insisted in a thickening whisper. "That envelope, I thought it must have dropped from the dead man's coat as he fell."

"However, it encloses a letter in some undecipherable code written on the stationery of the War Office of Helvania, addressed to you, sealed with the Helvanian badge. The official seal is enough to implicate that country and," he slammed the envelope on the table, "Field Marshal von Reinmar's name is among the ciphers."

General von Neumann spun at his staff. Helmets nodded in unison. The burly officer was barking furiously into the radio phone. Von Neumann turned back at Stehli. "We convict you, Anton Stehli, of espionage. A Swiss national employed by the Helvanian War Office, hired by that country to assassinate Field Marshal von Reinmar. The court sentences you to be shot immediately as a spy!"

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Immediately! There was a shiver in the atmosphere, an indrawing of breath, an ejaculated protest from Nielsen, a quiet sob from Alexandra Frantsovna. But there was no suggestion of a quaver in Anton Stehli's voice.

"I am not a spy."

General von Neumann snorted the deadly accusation through set teeth. "Then what were you doing with all those pigeons?"

PAUL EMMERICH remained where he stood, pulses cold in his wrists, his mind as gray as the uniforms tramping about him. *Gott,* the look on that Stehli's face. He wanted to turn away, to run from the thing. He tried to decode the staccato stuttering of the tele-type machines carrying this message to the power behind the lines. He tried to plug his ears with the snarling of the radio installed in the room where the dead general had sprawled. Why had the Swiss done the thing? A spy, of course. Helvania behind it? *Grüss Gott!* but here was another blow-off. Strange how calmly the man denied everything, too. That look.

Tramp, tramp, tramp. Rifle barrels crossing the window like shadows on a cinema screen. He couldn't help it, and at the command to fire his eyes jerked around in horror at the scene. Against the garden wall, the man stood without a blindfold. Facing the muzzles of those automatic guns, his eyes were blue in the sunshine, his features serene. A breeze from somewhere stirred the tangled mass of his unbowed gray hair; he might have been posing for a photograph. Just before the blast of the rifles a white dove fluttered down and perched on Stehli's shoulder.

The dove's head was shattered, too.

Emmerich stood in cold shock as the windows shuddered, the whole cottage seemed to shudder from that gun-blast; and the echoes were hardly gone when a furious outcry burst in the street before the cottage.

"Stop it, damn you! Let me in there! God—too late—"

Cursing, Paul Emmerich whirled from the windows to the door. Dust boiled in the street where sentries were fighting with a man in civilian clothes, a savage-eyed foreigner who struggled to reach the cottage through a swarm of gun-butts and fists. A Reichswehr whirled in the grip of this maddened individual, blocking the jabs of bayonets.

Emmerich saw a dirt-splashed Minerva limousine flying the American flag was halted at the curb, its front wheels on the sidewalk, and a man he failed to recognize came vaulting from the driver's seat, swinging an iron wrench.

"Hit 'em, Jawn. Teach 'em to touch us diplomats. Knock 'em for a row of Ash Wednesdays!"

"Keats!" Paul Emmerich shouted in the doorway. "The devil!" He bellowed an order to stand the Teuton guardsmen like sticks. Mid street in a roil of brown dust, John Keats bent upright, dragged a torn sleeve across his beaten face, then shouted in recognition.

"Emmerich! Damn it, man, you've just shot an innocent—you've just killed Anton Stehli. I saw it all, Emmerich! These blockheaded guards wouldn't let me get in there to testify."

Paul Emmerich said in a low ferocity, "You! Saw what?"

"Behind this cottage," Keats yelled. "I was up on those birdhouses back there. Didn't know the place was Stehli's home. We parked the car on the next street and I'd climbed atop those pigeon cotes to watch the fighting under the mountain—"

MIST broke on Emmerich's face. "*You* were behind this house?"

"I'm telling you, Emmerich, you railroaded him! Stehli didn't kill your general. I could see through the window of that room from where I lay. Stehli walked up to the glass and lowered the window from the top. I could just make out that officer behind him. When Stehli jumped around the officer was already falling. I saw him go down—"

Emmerich thundered, "Impossible. You

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lie! They were in that room alone by Stehli's own admission. He was a spy. You remember how he always talked with pigeons? *Ja!*"

Keats shook a fist out of the dust. "And I say he didn't shoot that man. I got down from that pigeon house, tried to reach the cottage. These damned Reichswehr men caught me before I could get around front. Gagged me and trotted me off to see the guard corporal. I couldn't get loose till Crazy drove up—"

"Anton Stehli," Emmerich snarled, "was alone in that room by his own testimony. The only others in the place were in front. Nielsen and that Russian woman, Frantsovna. They were here. They—"

Keats' throat cracked on an amazed cry. "Nielsen! Frantsovna! Where are they, Emmerich? Where did they go?" His body had doubled in a tensed crouch, chin down, arms away from his sides, as if he were about to launch a flying tackle at the officer in the cottage door. Bewildered, the Reichswehr troopers had backed to the curb in a semicircle, bayonets pointed. "I've got to see them!" John Keats husked at Emmerich. "Nielsen! Frant—"

"They," Emmerich bit out, "left in their cars twenty minutes ago; ordered over the Helvanian border. I do not think you will see them, John Keats." He began a strange, dry-lipped grin. "As for *you*—"

As for John Keats, he went backwards in an acrobatic that carried him to the Minerva's running board, and Crazy Hooper with him. Before the surprised Teuton soldiers could apprehend his intention, the car was off through the sunshine at a roar.

"Get 'em!" John Keats was hollering at his chauffeur. "Straight down Godek Pass to Helvania. Nielsen and Frantsovna! They just left here! Go like hell!"

Crazy Hooper went. Following instructions in spirit as well as letter, he sent the long car screaming around a turn, grazed the flank of a motor transport with a hair-raising figure-eight skid, bumped through a ditch to skirt a cart, and streaked back into open highway heading east.

Emmerich plunged out into the dust and vapors of the street, his nerves unfrazzling in a flood of oaths, booting and clouting at his woodenish men. "Stop that car! After them! Stop those men! Stop them, you fools!" Already the dirty limousine was far down the shoulder of the mountain. Eastward the highway was clean of traffic save for two racing specks where the concrete ribbon thinned to a white, curving string at the Helvanian end of the valley. A green hedge of pines marked the Swiss-Helvanian boundary; and, as Emmerich watched, the two specks at valley bottom disappeared into this border-mark of timber. Then the dusty limousine which had temporarily vanished behind a grassy ridge sprang out into view and diminished in size down the open road. Its American bunting made a bright spot of color against the valley's lilac and the car was a flash in wind.

A Reichswehr corporal whipped a Mannlicher sharpshooter to his shoulder and squinted down the sights at the streaking target.

"No!" Emmerich snapped. "Bring them alive!"

THE corporal ducked his chin agreeably, and the Mannlicher flashed. Dirt squirted up in the weeds near the limousine's zigzagging stern. The marksman scowled, tried again. But the car streaked behind a field of wheat stacks; made a crosscut over a checkerboard of fields and was already half way down the divide. The sniper wasn't living who could have punctured a tire at that pace.

Emmerich cursed and flung up frantic arms. A sergeant puffed on a whistle. Motorcycles came in a roaring squad through the village. Sirens going, pennons flagging, a posse of gray-green machines geared to a hundred an hour soared off down the mountain in scorching pursuit. The highway to Helvania trailed a chrome plume of dust in the azure sunlight; for a minute Emmerich followed the chase through his Zeiss glasses; then he lowered the binoculars with a gloomy curse and

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ran into the cottage where the radio was crackling.

Through the window to the garden he saw the firing squad was tramping away, and soldiers were moving along the shot-spattered wall with spades and a weighted stretcher. General von Neumann and staff had clustered under the wall in loud discussion. Their gritty voices droned, indistinct in the blurt and crackle of the radio apparatus. Nervously scrubbing his hands on his handkerchief, Emmerich stamped to the table to take a sheaf of reports from the wireless officer.

The Teutonic capital was sending through a code call for General von Neumann. All military operations in Switzerland had ceased. Schnitzler would be on the air in five minutes with special message. Generals of division stand by for important word from High Command.

"Take these to General von Neumann." He was glad to send the subaltern out to his uncle; glad for a moment alone. *Gott,* what a wretched business. Who could have known that the shooting in the Hotel Metropole could have brought so terrible a consequence. Fifty hours ago he had been a conference reporter for the *Tageblatt*—today he was standing in the house of a friend, become an enemy, a cog in the mightiest death-dealing machine the world had ever known. No personal victory in this pogrom. For him, his world had overturned.

He leaned against the table, aching, trembling; rubbed a wrist across his eyes. This was the price one paid for one's Fatherland. His mother lost, maybe dead among the ruins of the capital—his home city ravaged by the Esperench air fleet in payment for that torpedo bombardment on their own capital. His father dead. His friend Gussie dying in that ambulance in a welter of blood and hate, cursing him at the last. Stehli the Swiss—a spy shot at the wall—a truncated body shoveled under his own flower garden. Those others! Paul Emmerich clawed slender fingers through his gray-streaked hair. Friends turned into deadly foes. Villainy out of its ratholes at last. The Yankee would pay for some of this. That American knew—

"Major Emmerich!"

SPOKEN quietly from behind him, his name interrupted thought, and he spun from the table to see a shadow paused in the sun and dust of the cottage door. A slim captain of Reichswehr infantry looking in from the street. The man saluted mechanically, stepped into the cottage, and closed the door behind him. Then he stood deferentially before his superior, the collar of his gray-green military coat drawn up to his ears, his eyes strangely dark and alert under the brim of his iron helmet.

"You have caught the Americans already, Herr Captain?" Emmerich demanded.

"I have caught you," was the unexpected response. "Raise a call to those men in the garden, lift your voice above conversation and I will blow you and all these *salopards* to perdition. Blow up Esperance, will you? Torpedo our homes? Kill my father before my eyes? But I've got you and the rest of your dirty general staff where I want you. *Non,* you dare not shoot. Enough high explosive in my pocket to lift the top of this mountain and your murderous Teuton officers with it at one jolt. And in good time I'm going to lift it."

The man in the uniform of a Reichswehr captain pulled a paper-wrapped parcel from his coat and balanced it on a palm. The collar flapped down from his jaws. Cat-green light raged in the man's narrowed eyes. Emmerich saw the livid scar on his cheek, and sucked an icy breath.

It was Raoul Dubail.

FOR the space of a minute it seemed to Paul Emmerich as if the world had come to a stop on its axis. As if the air in that cottage room had become a lifeless vacuum. Conversation in the garden without was the voices of bees in a far-off infinity; the chug and mutter of traffic beyond the closed door came from

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another world. He could not look at the deadly package in Dubail's hand. Madness in the man's eye held him mesmerized. A drop of perspiration trailed ice down the side of his nose.

"How—how did you get here?" The whispered question was as foolish in that moment of horror as a titter in a vault.

Dubail's mouth was laughing without making a sound. The skin along his jaws was yellow, and his teeth looked dry. As casually as if he were handling a loaf of bread, he returned the package to his coat pocket, limped a step forward, stood with folded arms.

"*Herr Gott*, Raoul, what are you doing in this masquerade? The war is finished between your country and mine. What do you want here? Another minute and my uncle, the staff generals will be in here. This is headquarters of general staff—"

"Ah, *oui, alors*, that is why I am here." Again Dubail's teeth shone in that silent laugh. "I wanted to find the generals. The officers who command this machine that murders innocent citizens without warning. I, Raoul Dubail, rejected by my air corps because I am lame, I came to fight you as a taxi driver. Ho ho! Came to Switzerland in a little cab to kill you—"

Pain wrung Emmerich's mouth to a colorless twist. "Why me, Raoul, why—"

"Because you are a Teuton and I would kill you and all your monstrous kind to the last man, by the name of Jean of Luz, I would! But since I cannot kill them all, I will slay those at the top, the generals, the Neros who laugh at the burning, *mais oui!* All through the night I drove. Stehli in his cab. But he did not recognize me, *non!* He did not know it was I who brought him from our city. And then I waited until this fine young Reichswehr captain walked by a certain doorway with a song of victory on his swinish lips. He thought the war was over, eh?" Dubail's hands pantomimed a wringing gesture. "So it was for him. So it is for you—"

"Dubail, in the name of the *lieber Gott*—"

"*Non! Non!*" Lightfooted, the Esperenchman backed away. "Do not touch your gun, Teuton. Shoot me and this packet hits the floor—*pouf!* and this village is gone. Shreds you would be. Faceless shreds like my father on the floor of his little bake shop when the first torpedo struck. And now you will call your officers into this room. You will summon these butchering Teuton generals. Raoul Dubail has come with a reckoning"—he shook a pale fist at the windows—"a reckoning with the War Lords who killed my helpless father. And you, friend Emmerich, because of those murders at the Metropole—"

"At the Metropole?" Emmerich said huskily.

Dubail laughed soundlessly. "Who else but you could have done it? Who else could have slipped by the police detectives of that city? Did you know I discovered there was a transom between that dining room and the bedroom where the press—"

"Why should I do it, Raoul?" Voice brittle with desperation, Emmerich spoke with an eye to the windows. Any minute his uncle's staff would be coming in. He must stall, stall. "Why should I kill the statesmen?"

"Your father was bankrupt. I saw what happened on the exchange. Once you told me about your holdings in chemicals. Behold what a war did, then, for Emmerich Leather!"

HEAT swam in colored spirals before Emmerich's eyes. The floor was sinking and he must brace himself by gripping the table. "*Mein Gott*, you thought that of me? And I—I thought it was you!"

"Butcher! Swine! You dared blame me for those murders?"

"*Ja*," Emmerich whispered. "Because I knew you hated Gatreau. To kill Gatreau you must also kill Von Speer. And then I found your gun—"

"My gun?" Dubail spat. "Where?"

"It was after I turned in my story to the *Tageblatt* office," Emmerich said desperately. "I returned to the hotel. Your pistol was lying near that door with the

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full length mirror. It had just been fired empty. Because you were my friend I picked it up and fled, thinking you must have dropped it there and it had been overlooked when we entered the bedroom to write our accounts. That is why I questioned you at the Café Guste. I knew our police would have held you for the assassinations. I was afraid for your life, and when I reached my home I threw your gun away, into a pond—"

"And I do not believe your lying words because you are a Teuton, a Boche, with the blood of murderers in your veins," was Dubail's condemnation, harsh through those dry white teeth, "*enfin* I will kill you all."

Then it seemed to Paul Emmerich as if everything in the world happened at once.

The cottage door lashed inward with a blurt of sounds, and a yelling cycle Uhlan officer charged across the sill. "Herr Major, the Americans got away. Even as we caught up with them their car crossed the frontier. The Yankee chauffeur leaned from the window and put a thumb at us to his nose. As we are not at war with Helvania my men could not pursue across the line—"

Raoul Dubail, uniformed as a Reichswehr captain, whirled screaming at the intruding cyclist.

Faster than he had ever moved in his life, Paul Emmerich snatched the repeating pistol from his belted holster, sprang at Dubail's back, crashed the gun barrel down *whack!* on the exposed neck-nape. Dropping the gun, he caught Dubail's sagging body by the armpits and held him upright, his voice going like talk out of nightmare.

"It is all right," he heard himself panting at his men, inventing frantically. "This is Captain Scheldt of the Bavarians. Shell shocked in this morning's battle. His mind had gone, but he will be all right although he may not know who he is—"

Popeyed with astonishment, the general staff was trooping in. Somehow his uncle was at his side, gesturing, shouting. "Shades of Friederich Wilhelm! is this headquarters a madhouse? Who is this captain? Who sent these cycle officers after that American car?"

"This is Captain Scheldt. He is sick. I sent the cycle Uhlans. The Americans in that car will try to spread the story we shot the Swiss spy without cause. One is a Yankee newspaper man who had a hand in the murder of Von Speer at the Metropole. My men could not pursue them across a neutral boundary into Helvania—"

And the radio officer, who had darted to his cackling wireless instruments, came rushing across the floor with wires and phones clapped to his shaved head, report blanks flagging in his hands, mouth going like a loud speaker.

"Herr General! *Offiziers!* It has come. Announcement from the High Command to all general staffs. Replacing Feld Marshal von Reinmar, General Gottlieb von Neumann is appointed *Feld-Marshal* in command of the entire Teuton armies. In reason of Von Reinmar's assassination and its obvious inspiration in the Helvanian War Office, hostilities are to open at once in the east. August Schnitzler, himself, is coming to join our march on the Helvanian capital. With his own hand he has just signed the declaration. *Teutony declares war on Helvania!*"

HALF asleep in the hot gold of noon (how'n hell could a growing man keep awake on an empty stomach?) Crazy Hooper had just sweated through the somnambulistic motions of changing his third tire while John Keats kibitzed and swore and got in the way. Crazy yearned to sit on the ferny mountain grass along this baking white roadside and snore. When had he slept last? When had he last eaten? Blinking warmth from his eyelashes, he made drowsy efforts to stow the tools and tire pump back in the kit, his hungry eyes on the gay wings of a yellow butterfly exploring some near-by laurel, fragrant under a signpost that read, "*Helva. E. 60 Klo.*" Reminded of a city and restaurants, his hands came awake and hurried.

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Then a sound, a far-off disturbance in the crystal Alpine stillness, caused him to look backward toward that descending five miles of whitewashed road down which they had come. At first he could not discover what it was, and stood peering toward sunny distance, nibbling doubtful nourishment from a green fingernail.

"Snap into it," came John Keats' fatigue-cracked rasp. "We could've overhauled the Russian girl's crate if this tire—"

Crazy Hooper's yell took all the words out of Keats' mouth. "Holy Jerusalem—look at that!"

John Keats looked back. What had seemed at first glance to be a smoking pour of metal flowing down through the Pass became sunlight tipping a million moving steel-points with fire. Brightness coming eastward on that road in a high and rushing column of gold dust, like a funnel of shiny wind. John Keats shook the hair from his eyes, and saw what it was. A wheel-jack fell from his nerveless hand. Great Lord!

It wasn't any cycle squad after them this time. The entire Teutonic Army was after them. The entire Teutonic Army, humming across the border of Helvania; and as far as John Keats could see there wasn't a single Helvanian soldier in sight to stop the flood!

But an old man in the black gaiters of a cleric had appeared in the road-bend ahead and came strolling up the middle of the concrete with a basket of cut flowers over one arm and a painted placard under the other. As the old man trudged past the Minerva, he gave its wild-eyed occupants a cheery nod. Crazy was pumping on the starter, and John Keats stared at the old man's sign. The sign said, "Welcome."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Curious Mistakes on Maps

IN the seventeenth century, some people thought California was an island separated from the west coast by the "Gulf of California or Red Sea." A map showing this island was made by Herman Moll, an English geographer, who showed its outlines with great care. The Northwest he admitted to be "Parts Unknown," though it contained a large lake at the source of the Missouri River about where we might call Montana. Possibly he meant the Great Salt Lake. Said the map, "Many villages on ye Islands."

Florida was shown as a mere bump, a mistake shared by the Occident Company of France, whose undated map appeared some time in the 17th century. Florida also had a large island off its west coast, and a very long thin bay extending through what we call Miami. New Jersey fared badly as it often did on old maps, appearing as a thin peninsula—Nouveau Jersay, as it was called; other States being Nouvelle Yorke, Virginie, Pensilvanie and Marie-Lande.

No Long Island appeared on a map dated 1677, but instead were three islets of no importance. This was the work of the Seigneur de Champlain, who did fairly well, but who showed Lake Huron (or Grand Lac) running back into nowhere and getting larger till it became the "Calm Sea."

Other maps showed Long Island as a most irregular piece of ground and one made in 1643 gave it as two, both long and slender. This particular map also showed Lake Champlain as a very large oval about the size of Lake Erie.

—*J. W. Holden.*

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One Man Feud

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

Though this was a fight between men, it was like an animal battle with no rules or skill—except that of wolf and lynx

JUST at dusk Octave Garneau found the man whom he had come into the bush to kill. This was the best time, for several reasons. John Duncan was going in from his trap line and he would be less alert about camp than in the bush. And the door would be unbarred until bedtime.

Garneau stopped at the edge of the bush and watched. He saw a little log cabin with a bark roof, set in a small clearing. Duncan put his snowshoes up beside the door and went inside. After a moment the windows were lighted. Garneau crouched in the shelter of some firs and waited with a long patience.

He could not afford to miss, or even to

John Duncan's fists swung like hammers

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wound his man. For Duncan was as quick as a panther, big-boned, with tremendous power in his long muscles. No matter how well Garneau might think of his own bulldog ferocity and granite block of a body he did not underestimate the man he had come to kill. John Duncan was dangerous.

Duncan came out of the cabin with a water pail in his hand and a dog yelping and bounding beside him. Garneau was glad that the faint drift of air was in his direction. Otherwise the dog might have caught his scent and that would have meant trouble. For Duncan was a man who would walk into a storm of bullets.

The trapper returned from the waterhole and kicked the cabin door shut behind him. The dog had gone inside. A pencil of light showed Garneau, as he approached, that the door was not latched. Luck was dealing him good cards.

He slipped out of the snowshoe thongs and his moccasins made no sound on the hard packed snow about the door. With the barrel of his rifle he pushed the door open another inch. He could see Duncan's back as the man stood in front of the fireplace, filling his pipe from a can of tobacco on the shelf there.

Octave Garneau was perfectly steady as he knelt and took a knee and elbow rest. His eye drew two imaginary lines, one down from the center of Duncan's head and one straight across his shoulders. The soft nose bullet would break John Duncan's spine, and Garneau hoped that he would live a few seconds to know who had killed him.

In kneeling Garneau had pushed the door, noiselessly, still farther open. His knee was on the threshold and his left arm extended into the room along the rifle barrel. He sighted carefully and squeezed the trigger.

At that instant something struck gun barrel and arm a violent blow. Garneau pitched forward into the room and the rifle blazed at the floor. He felt, even as he was falling, points of pain which sank into his arm through sleeves of shirt and jacket.

It was the dog, a black mongrel devil. Garneau rolled, struck the dog on the head with the rifle butt, and came up onto his feet. John Duncan was on him, swinging fists like hammers. Garneau dropped the rifle and drew his knife. He made a lightning thrust.

It was an upward, well-driven knife blow, calculated to run in under the ribs and give a man a death wound. The fight would have ended then if one of those big knots of bone and muscle at the ends of Duncan's arms had not landed on the nose of Octave Garneau. It struck home like a sledge before the knife could touch flesh.

The pain was excruciating, blinding. In that moment of weakness Garneau's fingers released the knife and it fell. Then he bored in against the vague blur in front of him. His hands clawed for eyes, nose, mouth. An ear was better than no hold.

The fight was now an affair wholly of the bush, an animal battle to the death with no rules and no skill—except that of wolf and lynx. Garneau got one of Duncan's thumbs between his jaws; he felt his teeth grate on bone. He would have splintered the bone if there had not come a sudden, deathly pressure across the small of his back.

Garneau fell, and tried to double up. He kicked, struggled to raise a knee for a vicious blow in the groin. But the terrible pressure was too strong: it was an embrace of death. His hands groped. He tried to work his thumbs into Duncan's eyes but the strength was ebbing out of him. The cabin went black. He thought that this was death, that he would hear his backbone snap. He sank into darkness.

WHEN John Duncan rose from the still body of Garneau he could scarcely stand on his own two legs. His shoulders hung loose, his arms swung like nerveless pendulums before him. Blood and saliva ran from his mouth corners. There were livid bruises on his face and it seemed to him that every joint and sinew of his body had been wrenched upon the rack.

Duncan reeled to the bunk and fell upon it. The dog came up to him, whimpering.

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He reached out with an arm as weak as a child's and laid his hand on the dog's head.

"Pete!" he gasped. "Good boy! He'd have got me if you hadn't jumped!"

Minutes later Duncan got up, groaning through clenched teeth. He went to a cupboard and took out a cherished bottle of whisky. He drank, and drank again, and strength came back to him. He shut the door, dropped the bar into place, and made up the fire. Then he turned his attention to the man on the floor.

Garneau was alive. Duncan lifted him to the bunk, took off his jacket, searched him for weapons, and then tied his ankles securely. Duncan ran the rope to a spike in the wall. The prisoner could sit up in the bunk if he were able but he could not stand, for the rope was not long enough to allow his feet to reach the floor.

Duncan took the rifle and the knife and put them at the far end of the room. Then he turned out a generous cup of whisky and got it down Garneau's throat after a considerable struggle. In a minute or two life returned to the eyes of the man on the bunk. He began to mutter curses.

"Well, Octave," said Duncan. "You didn't kill me!"

Garneau sprang from the bunk as though his body were one spring of steel. He could have reached Duncan's throat, so sudden was that attack, but for the rope around his ankles. He sprawled headlong, face down, with a thud that shook the cabin and for the moment he was helpless again.

Duncan laid him back on the tumbled blankets. Garneau's crushed nose had begun to bleed afresh. He coughed and sat up. When he could speak he turned eyes black with hate on his captor.

"You killed Fleurette!" he snarled.

"So that's it!" exclaimed Duncan, in a low voice. "I thought of her when I turned around and saw you in the doorway tonight!"

Under the bruises John Duncan's face showed lines which had chiseled themselves into deep creases. His tousled brown hair was shot through with gray so that it had a silver gleam in the candlelight. He was a young man suddenly overlaid by a score of years in suffering.

"You have win her from me!" cried Garneau, slipping into broken English. "Me, I go away then. When an old *bûcheron* come to my village and say that Fleurette Dubois, who have make marry with the Yankee, is dead in the bush I know that I have to kill you! For you have not taken care of my Fleurette!"

"SHE and the baby died together," answered Duncan, in a lifeless voice. "I didn't know her heart wasn't strong enough for the bush. Not until too late."

"Fool!" hissed Garneau. "She would be alive if she have make marry with me!"

"Yes," agreed Duncan. "I've thought of that a heap, Octave! If it was to do over—"

"What for you talk?" demanded Garneau. "You got my rifle, my knife! Come, woman-killer! Finish me!"

"It looks as though I might have to." Duncan rubbed his chin. "What'll you do if I let you go free?"

Garneau laughed, and the sound of that laughter struck through John Duncan like a chill.

"Kill you!" promised Octave. "But next time I make sure!"

"You don't care whether you live or not, do you?"

"No!"

"Nor I don't, either," Duncan told him. "Well, I guess we could both put away some hot soup."

"What you do with me?" demanded Garneau. "Don't you be man enough, John Duncan, to kill me?"

"I guess so," replied Duncan. "But not now. We better both of us eat."

He brought a length of rope and cut two pieces a few feet long, measuring Garneau and the bunk with his eye. Then he suddenly threw himself forward and pinned the prisoner down.

Three minutes later the wrists of Octave Garneau were lashed to the ropes, which ran to each end of the bunk. He could

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raise either hand to his mouth but he could not get them together to work at the knots.

Duncan brought thick pea soup and a pewter spoon, and bread. Garneau hesitated; then he ate, and drank hot tea.

"You are a fool," he said.

"I know it, and this ain't the first time. But I'm too squeamish, I calculate, to starve you while I think things over. It looks as though one of us would have to make a visit to the angels, or the devil!"

"It will be that man who have bring Fleurette into the country above the river to die," said Garneau.

"Mebbe so," muttered John Duncan.

ON the morning of the third day Duncan rose as usual and went through the customary movements incident to living in a cabin in the bush. He raked up the coals out of the ashes and built a roaring fire. Then he took the water pail and went out, with Pete romping ahead.

When breakfast was ready Duncan went to the bunk where Octave Garneau lay securely tied through the night and readjusted the ropes. The arrangement of the first evening had proved satisfactory.

With feet and hands partially free Garneau could smoke, feed himself, shift his position at will, but he was helpless to make an attack. He had tried working at the knots with his teeth but Duncan had always seen him in time.

This morning Garneau ate in silence. During the past three days he had said all the words there were in him, or so it seemed to Duncan. John Duncan felt that he could have thought the matter out more swiftly if Octave had kept still.

He had raved at times: now about Fleurette, calling Duncan a murderer. Again, Duncan was a coward, afraid to loose his prisoner and fight it out with rifles or knives.

Last night Octave had begged Duncan to shoot him rather than keep him tied there like a captured animal.

Garneau was smoking when Duncan finished washing the few dishes, a luxury often dispensed with in the bush. His wide black eyes, still discolored from the fight, followed every movement of his captor.

Duncan went to the cupboard. He took out a razor and a shaving brush and broken fragment of mirror.

For a long time the rasp of the razor against the wiry stubble on his chin was the only sound in the room.

"What for you shave afore Sunday?" asked Garneau, at last. "What for you don't go out on trap line, for take in your catch, *hein?*"

"I didn't set the traps yesterday," replied Duncan slowly.

The silence that followed became fraught with meaning. There was going to be a change. Garneau sat up straight on the edge of the bunk and strained against the ropes.

"What you do?" he demanded, in a whisper.

"You'll find out pretty quick!" Duncan washed his face with a loud sputtering.

"He is brave man, that Jean Duncan!" sneered Octave. "He is *sauvage!* He like to make his enemy have pain, suffer!"

Duncan had heard worse things than that during the past three days. He did not reply. Instead he took his rifle, made sure that there was a cartridge in the chamber, and sat down with the weapon lying beside his chair.

"Octave," be began, wearily, "you and me was friends once."

"Yes, I have been friend with murderer," answered Garneau.

"I thought just as much of Fleurette as you did." Duncan's voice was very tired. He had not slept more than a handful of hours in the long nights. "But we'll let that go. I been trying to figger some way we could both live, for I don't want to kill you, Octave. But I can't see no way to work it out.

"Even if I was to take you out of the bush tied up and have you arrested it would only be putting off the end. That's so, ain't it?"

"I will kill you," Octave assured him, with the solemnity of a promise. "Next time I make sure!"

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"I thought so."

Duncan rose and brought Garneau's rifle.

He threw a cartridge into the chamber and set it down beside the bunk, just out of reach of the roped hands.

"There's one question I want to ask," he said. "If anything happens to me will you take Pete and take good care of him, or give him to somebody that will? You always liked dogs."

GARNEAU stared into the face of the man before him. His eyes went to the dog. Pete thumped his tail on the floor, for since the battle he had forgiven that blow on the head. The feeling in the cabin was not right to him, and yet his master did not radiate either hatred or fear for the man who never left the bunk. It was a little too much for Pete.

"That's a funny question," mumbled Garneau. "You give me a chance to fight, *hein?*"

"I'm asking questions," replied Duncan, "not answering 'em right this minute. Will you look out for Pete? I'll take your word."

"You know dam' well you can take word of Octave Garneau for anything! Yes, I be good to those dog. Mebbe I don't want dog that has been your dog, but I find good home for him in my village."

"All right!" Duncan rose again, with shoulders which seemed to carry a great weight. He put a rope around Pete's neck and led him outside, to the little lean-to where firewood was stored.

There Duncan glanced over his shoulder, then he knelt and put his arms around the dog's great neck. Pete licked his ear and wriggled frantically. This was most unusual. His master had not done this since the day the woman was taken away from the cabin.

Garneau had one wrist partly untied when Duncan went back indoors. John Duncan laughed with a dry, crackling sound. His knife slashed the rope from Octave's ankles.

"Get clear!" he said.

The ropes dropped away from the wrists of Octave Garneau. His body bent and snapped up again. He was on his feet, staggering a little, with the rifle in his hands. He held it across his body, cocked, with his finger curled around the trigger. Then he paused.

"Take those gun!" he panted. "You give me chance and I give you one! You get those gun up like this one! Then we fire!"

But Duncan, in the chair, shook his head.

"I druther be the one to go," he said. "I got nobody but Pete. Your folks are living. And mebbe I'll find Fleurette somewheres and the baby. I druther take a chance on finding them than to keep on living, so long as Pete is provided for."

The cracked and battered lips of Octave Garneau worked without bringing forth sound.

His finger inside the trigger guard moved slightly.

"I have swear I will kill you!" he whispered, finally. "I have make a vow!"

"Go ahead!" Duncan told him. "Take a rest on your knee! You're shaking! I don't want to be damaged without being finished off!"

Slowly the leg of Octave bent. His elbow met his knee, with the rifle leveled. Duncan, looking down the barrel, met the black eye behind the sights.

A strange elation filled him, and involuntarily he smiled.

A cry rang in the cabin, the cry of a soul tormented beyond endurance. The rifle clattered to the floor. Octave Garneau was on both knees before the bunk, with his face buried in the blankets. His brown, thick fingers dug into the fabric, his body shook from head to feet.

John Duncan rose with a sigh and stood beside the kneeling man. Good-by, Fleurette, for now. His hand dropped to Garneau's shoulder.

He would have to carry on, after all. Pete would be glad.

"Octave," he said, "a live friend is better than a dead enemy."

THE END

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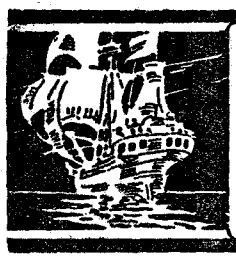

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

STUPENDOUS! — Powerful! — Magnificent!

Warm Springs, Ga.

Have just finished the last installment of "The Monster of the Lagoon," by George F. Worts. In my opinion, it is indisputably the best story you have published since January 1, 1935—or in quite a few other Januarys. It is, as the movie magnates say, "Stupendous! . . . Powerful! . . . Magnificent!" My reasons are easily given:

First, the characters—especially *Singapore Sammy*. Second, the element of surprise which constantly held the reader's interest. Third, the genuine thrills he received from the accounts of the terrible battles with the giant protoplasm. Fourth, the two principal elements of human interest, love and tragedy, which were inextricably woven into the plot, taking the story straight into the reader's heart and soul. Fifth, the beautiful English of the last two paragraphs. (Some may not consider this a real reason, but it left me with the feeling of having been a witness to something very sacred and very beautiful.) Sixth, the author, George F. Worts (more power to him!).

I hope that we may soon have more stories about *Singapore Sammy*—and of such high caliber.

SIDNEY WILLIAMS.

A VOTE for the unknown quantity:

Harrisburg, Pa.

I never read the ARGOSY until about three months ago. A friend of mine has been reading them for several years and had saved about forty back copies, which I borrowed. Since then Wednesday doesn't come soon enough for me to secure my copy.

To be truthful, I like all the stories, but the one that got me going was "The Monster of the Lagoon," by George F. Worts. It had me on pins and needles—I wanted to know what the monster was and what happened to the victims. The unknown quantity in such stories is what I like. "The Monster of the Lagoon" had it in full measure.

(MRS.) JEANETTE R. NORRIS.

A WRITER of masterpieces—or not?

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

I was about to sit down at my typewriter and give up a line about one of the stories in the March 23rd ARGOSY, "With the Help of Henry," by W. C. Tuttle ("Tut"). I thought I liked that yarn so well I might be able to win a prize of a year's subscription to ARGOSY. But along came the April 6th number, and I went into raptures over "Hind Hide," by H. H. Matteson. It is by far the best story I have read in ARGOSY for many a year, and I have been reading ARGOSY since back in the days of *Allstory-Cavalier Weekly*.

Every angle of Matteson's story is true to the atmosphere of the far Aleutians, as I remember that rugged country and its rough and colorful

WHAT is *your* idea of the best story (of any length, from short story to serial) published in ARGOSY since January 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which, in the opinion of the editors, give the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others, the magazine will reward the letter-writers with twelve full, yearly subscriptions. We don't want mere praise; we are interested in finding out exactly what stories you like best. Nor do we care about your literary style or skill. If there is some story that you liked so much that it stands out in your memory above all others, that is the story we want you to tell us about. It isn't necessary for you to read every story published in ARGOSY. You will have just as good a chance to win one of those twelve subscriptions if you read six of the stories published as you would if you read them all. But we must know *why* you liked the story you choose as best.

Letters selected by the editors will be published from week to week, *but not all letters published will receive subscriptions.*

Make your comments as long or as short as you wish, for mere length will not be considered. Put down all your reasons, however. Then address your letter to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City, so that it will reach us not later than August 1st, 1935.

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characters. No small part of the yarn's punch lies in the author's treatment of nicknames, the important factor they play in the geographical naming of the country, as well as being just good convenient monickers for he-men. I remember one salmon cannery watchman at Port Morten, who did nothing in the long winter months but report by wireless the ice flows, in and out of the channel of Bering Sea, along the Alaska Peninsula, to the head office on the opposite or Pacific Ocean side. All the code he knew was enough to enable him to report daily "No Ice," or just plain "Ice," as the case might have been. Hence he became known all over Southwestern Alaska as "Ice-no-ice" Charley.

Doctor Matteson, in his yarn, has subtly caught the redeeming feature of the white inhabitants of the Aleutians: a man's faithfulness to a friend, whether man or beast. A close hand study of friendships in that country will make almost any man, I believe, sit up and take notice.

ARGOSY can be mighty proud of Matteson's short stories of the far Aleutians and the Pacific Northwest, for I believe that in the future they will take a prominent place alongside Bret Harte's masterpieces of the old West.

I have seen Dr. Matteson's home port, where he pauses between his world wanderings to write his yarns, in a tiny island-cabin overlooking the Pacific, not far from Rosario Strait, that sea-lane which teems with Alaskan boat traffic. From all I have heard of Matteson and his "man's humanity to man," I believe him to be well worthy of the roster of "Men Who Make the ARGOSY"—well stocked in its bounteous cargo of treasures.

VICK WILSON, Ph.G.

Lyndonville, Vt.

I want to say that I think that the "The Wild Man of Cape Cod," by Fred MacIsaac, is the story which, in my opinion, is the most interesting you have published so far during 1935.

Reason 1—The location of the story is familiar to me.

Reason 2—It deals with an honest young man, *Steve Cobb*, who wants to save the concern built up by his father, and to avenge his father's murder.

Reason 3—I like the hero's good mental and moral character; also, he possesses a lot more nerve than most of us.

Reason 4—This story isn't a silly love story of the kind most men dislike to read.

Reason 5—The story is exciting and filled with suspense.

I bought one of your magazines some time in January of this year, and since it was only a ten-cent magazine I didn't think it would be very good. Yet it has turned out to be one of the three magazines I most enjoy reading.

The worst story in this year's magazine that I have read is "Hind Hide," by H. H. Matteson.

Sincerely yours,

CARROLL F. WOOD.

LOOKING AHEAD!

SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE

You've read stories of the French Foreign Legion of course, but do you know the *real* Legion? Here it is, in a new story by a famous author—a story you won't be able to forget. A long novelette by

J. D. NEWSOM

HEADING BOSS

Remember "East River," which ARGOSY published last October? One of the authors of that amazing story of sandhogs and under-river tunnels has done it again! He's turned out another yarn about the lusty boys who laugh in Death's face as they burrow through the muck. A new three-part serial by

BORDEN CHASE

BLACKOUT

An amazing tale of horse racing; of the luck it takes to make the ponies win (and to win on the ponies). A novelette by a master of fiction:

JUDSON P. PHILIPS

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—JUNE 1

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AND TO THINK THEY USED TO CALL ME SKINNY

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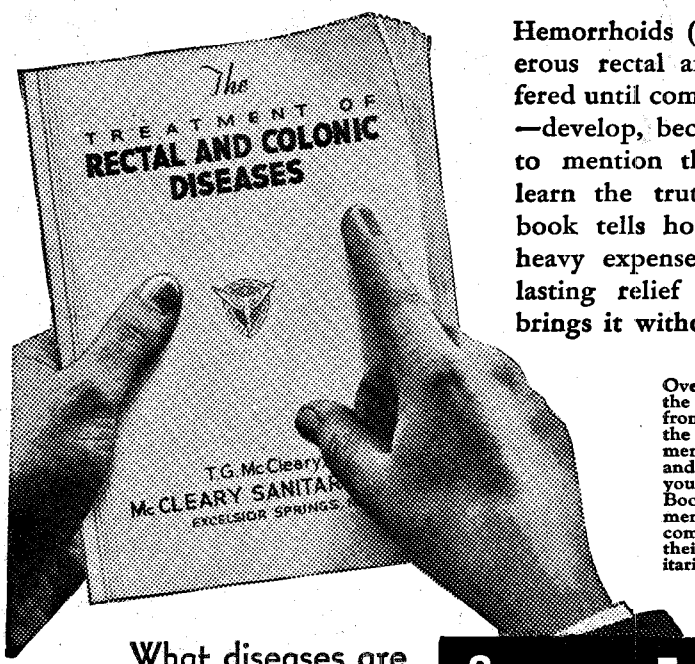

Hemorrhoids (Piles) and other treacherous rectal afflictions are often suffered until complications—even cancer—develop, because people, not liking to mention these afflictions, fail to learn the truth in time. This new book tells how long suffering with heavy expense can be avoided, and lasting relief secured. The coupon brings it without charge.

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